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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MOROCCO:

COMMUNICATIONS PRACTICES, MECHANISMS OF INFLUENCE, AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of 'Master'

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DEDICATION

Words can never express my deep love and gratitude for these people.

To the memory of my aunt, one of the strongest people I have ever known, whose strength will always inspire me.

To my mother and father, for their unconditional love and sacrifices.

To my sisters, for their constant support and encouragement.

And to my grandmother, for her love, wisdom, and prayers.

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Finally, my biggest thanks to my family and friends for all the support you have shown me through this research,

ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MOROCCO: COMMUNICATIONS PRACTICES, MECHANISMS OF INFLUENCE, AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

BY

Sara SAID

Abstract: Social media has become an indispensable part of people's daily lives. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the influence of social media on communications practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioral change of Moroccan university students. The sample consisted of 180 participants aged 18 to 35 years (95 females, 85 males) selected through convenience sampling using an online survey distributed via WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, across seven faculties in the Souss-Massa region. The data were obtained using a six-section Likert-scale survey, administered in English and French to maximize participation. The results showed that social media exerts measurable influence within all three dimensions, indicating that students curate their online self-presentation, while remaining susceptible to algorithmic influence despite being aware of it. The findings provide clear support for H1 and H2. In contrast, H3 receives partial support as significant differences emerged in relation to Moroccan communal values and religious identity. At the same time, 48.3% of participants describe social media's influence as neutral, suggesting that its effects have become normalized and integrated into students' everyday lives. The study also emphasizes the importance of investigating the cognitive effects of sustained social media use for future research.

Keywords: social media influence, digital identity, self-presentation, algorithmic influence, social comparison, behavioral change, Moroccan university students, digital literacy.

ABSTRACT

(Résumé)

L'INFLUENCE DES MÉDIAS SOCIAUX SUR LES ÉTUDIANTS UNIVERSITAIRES AU MAROC : PRATIQUES COMMUNICATIONNELLES, MÉCANISMES D'INFLUENCE ET CHANGEMENT COMPORTEMENTAL

Les médias sociaux sont devenus une partie indispensable de la vie quotidienne. Cette recherche a pour objectif d'examiner l'influence des médias sociaux sur les pratiques de communication, les mécanismes d'influence et le changement comportemental des étudiants universitaires marocains. L'échantillon est composé de 180 participants âgés de 18 à 35 ans (95 femmes et 85 hommes), sélectionnés par échantillonnage de convenance à l'aide d'un questionnaire en ligne diffusé via WhatsApp, Facebook et Instagram, auprès de sept établissements universitaires de la région Souss-Massa. Les données ont été collectées à l'aide d'un questionnaire composé en six sections, basé sur une échelle de Likert, administré en anglais et en français afin de maximiser la participation. Les résultats révèlent que les médias sociaux exercent une influence mesurable sur les trois dimensions étudiées. Ils indiquent que les étudiants adaptent leur image de soi en ligne tout en restant soumis à l'influence des mécanismes algorithmiques, même lorsqu'ils sont conscients de leur présence. Les résultats confirment clairement H1 et H2. En revanche, l'hypothèse H3 reçoit un soutien partiel, des différences significatives ayant été observées en lien avec les valeurs communautaires et l'identité religieuse marocaines. Par ailleurs, 48,3 % des participants considèrent l'influence des médias sociaux comme neutre, ce qui suggère que leurs effets sont désormais normalisés et intégrés dans la vie quotidienne des étudiants. L'étude souligne également l'importance d'analyser les effets cognitifs d'une utilisation prolongée des médias sociaux dans le cadre de recherches futures.

Mots-clés : influence des médias sociaux, identité numérique, image de soi, influence algorithmique, comparaison sociale, changement comportemental, étudiants universitaires marocains, culture digital.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview and background of social media's influence on digital consumers, with a specific focus on Ibn Zohr University students in Morocco, which is the target population of this thesis. This part of the study explores the purpose and significance of the study, and highlights its scope and limitations. It also presents the aims and objectives of the study, along with, the main research question, and the hypotheses developed to guide the study.

1.2 Background of the Research

Today, it has become extremely difficult to spend a single day without interacting with social media, it does not matter which platform, as long as they serve a person's needs. It only takes one quick and simple scroll through any platform from Instagram to Tiktok an evident to realize how social media has become an integral part of individuals' everyday lives. What once appeared to serve as basic platforms for communication and entertainment has now developed into a virtual environment that influences opinions, behaviors, social lifestyles and even individuals' self-perception and identity.

According to DataReportal (2024), more than 5.17 billion active social media users worldwide in January 2024, a massive number that represent 63% of the global population. It is clear that, TikTok and Instagram are the most influential platforms for digital consumers. TikTok's worldwide expansion happened in 2018, leading to a current user base exceeding 1.88 billion monthly actives, Daily engagement averages 95 minutes per day on the platform more than on any other social media platform. Meanwhile, Instagram reports over 1.63 billion monthly users, based on Statista figures released in 2024 more than 70% of whom are below thirty-five years old.

Morocco is no exception to this digital evolution, According to DataReportal (2024), 21.3 million active social media users in January 2025, representing 55.7% of the total population. Within the Moroccan internet users, young adults aged 18 to 35 are the most active group of social media users, a segment that spend more than three hours daily scrolling through these platforms. Despite the diversity of social media platforms, a limited number of platforms have become indispensable to everyday routines.

While Facebook continues to maintain its position across different age groups, Instagram and Tiktok are considered the fastest growing platforms within younger users. According to DataReportal, Instagram registered around 13.1 million users, while Tiktok reaches 14.6 million users in early 2025. This rapid digital growth confirms the role of social media in Morocco and its deep integration into the daily lives of young people. University students are considered a relevant population for this study. As noted by Prensky (2001), identifies university students as digital natives who were raised in digital technologies era. In this regard, social media has become a key element of social, academic and cultural life.

Drawing on personal observation of social media practices over the past few years, as well as interpretations gained from a series of documentaries, especially *the Social Dilemma* and research literature including Castells' *the rise of the Network Society*. This transformation became noticeable in human beings lifestyle and online behavior. Communication today appears strange and incomprehensible, it has changed a lot. Social media users feel pressured to maintain their online presence, visibility and even social interaction, as these platforms shifted the traditional communication into multidirectional process where communication flows into multiple directions allowing individuals simultaneously to create and share content to online audiences. During my humble observation, I noticed that some individuals on social media act like performers, consistent with Erving Goffman's *the presentation of self in everyday life* considering social life as a theater. Seeking attention drive these users to behave like performers, appear less spontaneous, which raises a problematic question about how social media influences individuals to transform their real identities resulting in the creation of an alternative self.

Despite the growing body of international research on social media, few studies in the Moroccan universities address issues related to human well-being and social aspects. Most existing academic literature concentrates on Western, Asia or Middle East populations, with the majority in morocco focusing mainly on marketing strategies and decision-making processes. Leaving the digital experiences Arabic-speaking and North African populations remain underexplored. To contribute to this underexplored field, this research presents one of the first research-based investigations into social media's influence on the communication practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioral change of university students at Ibn Zohr University in Agadir, Morocco.

The concepts discussed below are the most relevant keywords used in this research to give clarity and meaning for the analysis:

1. Algorithms

Social media algorithms refer to automated systems used to filter, organize, and personalize content, based on users' history of engagement. Two people using Instagram for example may not see the same content even if they follow similar accounts, it is because these algorithms determine which content becomes visible and which remains hidden by analyzing users' online behavior, including their preferences, their watch time to create a personalized profile.

2. Digital Identity

Digital identity is defined as set of characteristics, expressions, images, and personal narratives created and circulated through online platforms. Digital identity develops through the interaction between personal choices and algorithmic systems (Papacharissi, 2011).

3. Variable Reward Scheduling

Variable reward scheduling is a behavioral conditioning mechanism in which rewards appear at unpredictable moments, creating a compulsive behavior that becomes difficult to resist (Skinner, 1938). This mechanism explains the habit of users to scroll for a long period without their consent or initial intentions (Alter, 2017). So the unpredictable appearances of likes, shares, and notifications create anticipation and desire to a continuous engagement.

1.3 Problem Statement

University students engage with social media platforms in a digital structured environment that are intrinsically non-neutral. Applications including, Instagram and Tiktok are constructed around algorithmic systems designed to increase user engagement, personalized feeds, and extended platform use. Social media systems function through a specific platform logic, influencing users without their full conscious awareness. Meanwhile, the impact of social media on communication and behavior have been discussed in other countries, research addressing these effects remains limited among the Moroccan university.

Several previous studies conducted on similar research topic focused on specific regions and populations while ignoring or giving small attention to North Africa students and Arab world in general. Moreover, studies on social media addressing social values in educational contexts often analyzes one single dimension, either communication, emotional well-being or platforms use, instead of studying them together. For this reason, the present study focuses on two major problems: first the absence of research-based data on Moroccan university students' social media behavior, second the necessity for a comprehensive approach merging these three aspects: communication practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioral change in a single research design. Working on this research requires examining various aspects, such as students' online self-presentation, the degree to which they are aware of the algorithmic systems, and what changes social media exposure brings to their daily life routine.

1.4 Significance and Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of this research is to provide strong empirical evidence on the influence of social media, specifically Instagram and Tiktok regarding Communication practices, mechanism of influence and behavioral change of University students at Ibn Zohr in Agadir, Morocco. As social media has become a crucial feature of academic and individual life, it is important for educators, researchers in Morocco to acknowledge the process through which these platforms affect the social, behavioral experiences of young adults.

This study is significant for the following groups:

Academia and researchers: this research contributes to the field of information and communication by presenting a significant quantitative approach on social media influence among Moroccan university students. It provides a validated research instrument and major variables that will guide future studies. It also applies theories such as Goffman's impression management theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and Pariser's filter bubble concept to the Moroccan context.

University students: This study benefits students by raising their digital literacy and awareness of the social media influences, their social interaction, perception, and behavior. By underlining the algorithmic design features that form their digital identity, it also advocates for balanced use of these platforms.

Future research: this study establishes a scientific and methodological foundation for future research, where investigations will specifically develop the cognitive dimension of social media influence, an area that this study considers a major direction for further research.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Research

The scope of this research is based on its target population, thematic orientation and study area. The research focuses on university students aged 18 and 35years enrolled in seven faculties in the Souss-Massa region of Morocco. Including, FLASH Ait Melloul, Faculty of Letters, and Humanities (FLSH), the Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences (FSJES), the Faculty of Sciences Agadir (FSA), the Higher School of Education and Training (ESEFA), the Faculty of Sharia and Legal Studies, and the Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taroudant. Instagram and Tiktok constitute the primary focus of this research as the two platforms most associated with the mechanism and processes of identity formation that represent the core of the research question.

This research provide several limitations that should be acknowledged. The application of voluntary response sampling limits the external validity of the results to cover all Moroccan university students. Relying on self-reported answers may expose the data to social desirability bias, especially in questions measuring the algorithmic dependency and emotional wellbeing. The cross-sectional design collects data during a specific period, and cannot show how attitudes and behaviors develop overtime neither confirm cause-and-effect relationship between variables. This research does not discuss all dimensions of social media influence, trust-issues, cultural aspects and cognitive effects of long-term use, these areas remains important for future research.

1.6 Aims and Objectives of the Research

The research objectives are essential in connecting the research problem to the research questions and the purpose of the study. These objectives are defined to develop clear and precise statement of the research. In this case, the aim extends beyond a one single definitive perspective, considering multiple dimensions that reveal the complexity of social media influence. As it focuses on university students' use of social media, their communication practices, self-presentation, as well as students' behavioral change. The following objectives of the research are associated with the research questions.

1. To determine student's social media usage habits, their preferences, time consuming, and their main motivations.

2. To examine how students present themselves and interact on social media, focusing on how this exposure connected to their digital identity.

3. To evaluate students' conscious of platforms mechanism and algorithmic influence.

4. To analyze the role of social media platforms in shaping digital consumer perceptions, lifestyle choices, and Daily life habits.

1.7 Research Question

Numerous studies have assessed the impact of social media on different social groups. This study focuses on multiple dimensions of social media that influence students at Ibn Zohr University. In order to find the answer, the study needs to start with a focus on how do social media platforms, especially Instagram and Tiktok influence the communication practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioral change? Once this question is answered, several detailed sub questions will guide this study to discover how these dimensions are interconnected.

1.8 Research Hypotheses

This study includes three hypotheses:

H1: Social media communication has a measurable impact on users' communication practices.

H2: Algorithms and personalized content influence the way users construct their digital identity.

H3: Moroccan digital consumers show signs of dependency that affects their behavior and critical thinking.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The emergence of social media has made it one of the most powerful key actors redefining contemporary society. Today, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube are no longer tools limited to entertainment; they have become crucial components of everyday life. They have become environments where people seek validation, self- expression, and social interaction. For instance, think about how often someone scrolls through TikTok clips or watches Instagram updates each day. Since these platforms are deeply embedded in our daily routines. Therefore, it is essential to examine with critical thinking the mechanisms through which social media exercises its influence on Moroccan users, especially among university students.

It is also crucial to note from the beginning that social media influence is not a simple phenomenon. As Evgeny Morozov (2014) argues that, digital culture is dominated by solutionism, which means that there is a tendency to reduce complex social issues into simple technical problems assumed addressable solely by digital tools. Whereas, this research considers social media influence as a complex process that involves platform design, cultural context, individual behavior, and social interaction.

While multiple platforms contribute to this digital ecosystem, this study focuses specifically on Instagram and TikTok since they are the most influential social media platforms in the world, each with billions of monthly active users (Statista, 2024).

This chapter aims to establish the theoretical foundations which can help further in the study of our problematic. According to McQuail (2010), any rigorous study of media begin by identifying useful frameworks that will allow researchers to ask the right questions. Therefore, the core objective of this chapter is to understand how social media operates as a space of influence and how it affects users' communication and behavior.

It first considers social media as a fundamental aspect of everyday life. Then review some previous literature and past studies related to communication theories. This chapter also analyzes social media as a bidirectional communication space, before exploring the mechanisms that produce influence, especially through algorithmic systems and engagement features.

2.1 Social Media as a New Regime of Influence

Social media is all about enabling users to express their thoughts, opinions, and beliefs with others. It is also about allowing people to connect with others and build social interactions. However, it is significant to mention that social media has changed communication in various ways: it has removed old boundaries from distance to time accrued in traditional communication, allowing people to share multimedia content with large audiences, and offers simple interfaces that make it easy for individuals to easily connect and share information. Even with those who are unfamiliar with the new technology, they find a way into digital world.

Digital platforms has allowed real-time access to news and information from across the internet. Therefore, many people now rely on social platforms as their primary source for keeping up with current events and trending content. Social media cannot be considered as a simple extension of traditional media forms such as television, radio, or the press. Instead, it represent a new regime of influence, operating through unique mechanisms and on an extraordinary scale. To understand how it affects Moroccan digital consumers and specifically university students, it is necessary to examine its structural characteristics, its modes of operation, and the underlying interests that drive its functioning.

Research demonstrates that Social media works according to a completely different logic; it is interactive, meaning users can produce and respond to content; personalized, and algorithmically oriented. Scholars such as Van Dijck and Poell (2013) explains that social media has its own rules and logic, which they call social media logic. Unlike traditional media, social media is built around three main ideas: making popular content more visible, encouraging users to interact, share, and turning every user action into data that platforms use to make money.

A brief overview of these relevant platforms of their emergence and development provides a better understanding of their role within the present digital environment. Instagram was launched in 2010, designed as a mobile-based social media application originally for sharing photograph, audiovisual content, including images and videos. Over time, the platform has introduced new features, such as Reels and InstaStories. Currently owned by Meta, Instagram functions as a significant platform for brand marketing, where endorsers and influencers promote products and services, in order to enhance consumer engagement and sales.

Although the platform attract a diverse user base, it was primarily Millennials who initially adopted it, followed subsequently by Centennials (GenZ), making it particularly relevant for multigenerational branding strategies. In 2018, the Chinese company Byte Dance launched TikTok as a global social media platform, after merging Musical.ly with Douyin. In contrast with Instagram, which transitioned from image-based content to video formats, TikTok was designed as a platform focused on short-form video content; its structure is based on continuous content consumption through an algorithmically curated feed, known as the "For You Page." This feed provides users with a personalized selection of videos based on their interactions, preferences, and degree of engagement. Consequently, TikTok represents a very distinct form of content exposure, where users are not supposed to search for content, but instead receive an unlimited flow of videos chosen by the platform itself.

The decision to focus particularly on Instagram and TikTok in this research is the depth of engagement they produce. In addition, their structural similarities between them. In fact, both platforms share almost identical content as well as users' practices. Instagram has launched short-form video features through its Reels feature, while TikTok continued to develop its tools for content creation and interaction. The global change in social media, where short and easily consumable content has become dominant, reflects user's preference for choosing to switch between these two platforms for scrolling videos all day long, encountering similar content and engaging in equivalent forms of interaction.

Beyond this, studying Instagram and TikTok can be justified by their interconnected reason and through several key elements. First, as this research focuses on young adults, these two platforms are specifically relevant due to their widespread use within this target population. Second, both platforms use audiovisual content rather than text-based networks, which makes them effective at transmitting aesthetic norms, lifestyle aspirations, and consumption habits to large audiences. Third, both platforms rely on algorithmic systems that define which content should become visible and which remains hidden. In other words, the algorithm personalize the content for each user, and in doing so, they influence people's preferences, expectations and behavioral change.

For these reasons, this research does not examine Instagram and TikTok as two separate entities. Rather, it considers them as complementary platforms that contribute to the transformation of communication practices, content circulation and the emergence of new forms of user engagement. The following section will provide a detailed analysis, based on media studies research, of how these platforms function as systems designed to attract and maintain user attention.

2.2 Communication and Media Theories

Any rigorous investigation of social media use must rely on established communication theories. These theories are crucial since they help us as researchers ask clear questions, develop strong arguments, and interpret the data we collect. Instead of focusing on only one approach, the present study adopt three complementary perspectives. To begin with, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains why individuals use social media. Second, Reception Theory shifts attention from use to interpretation, examining how users interpret the content they consume. While Social Comparison Theory focus on how social media influences individuals self-perception and behavior. Closely related to this, Social Learning Theory considers how users learn and adopt new behaviors though observation. Finally, Agenda Setting Theory shows how platforms influence what users consider important.

2.1.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory: Why People Use Social Media

The uses and gratifications was developed in the early 1940s by Katz and Blumler. It Considers media users as active consumers rather than passive, these users select and engage with media content to fulfill their specific needs instead of being passive recipients. According to Blumler and Katz's theory individuals take a major role in the communication process, reaching out media sources that best satisfy their needs and interests.

This theory proposes that the media users are generally aware of the reasons behind their media use, the need they seek to satisfy, and the gratifications they obtain. It helps explain why consumers choose certain media options available at a given time. In contrast with other studies that emphasize media's influence on individuals, Uses and Gratifications underline the user's freedom in forming their media experience, Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) categorized the uses and gratifications theory into several types of needs, such as affective, cognitive, personal, integrative, and tension-free needs.

Cognitive needs require seeking knowledge and information from media, for example, watching documentaries and searching for academic knowledge. Affective needs revolve around finding pleasurable experience in watching the content giving the best sample for people watching sport games. As for personal identity, it affect the way people use media to reinforce self-esteem and personal identity. Meanwhile social interaction focus more on the way people use media in order to connect with their loved one and friends. Tension free-needs, defined by its name it illuminate how individuals turn to media to escape from their sorrows and unpleasant situation in their personal life, to find peace and relaxation and self-relief, we may give example as listening to music, watching podcasts and other entertaining programs. It is crucial to understand what people need. This helps us understand why they pick certain media and how it affects what they do. Different reasons push users to like and interact with different media platforms.

The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) approach has long been recognized as a heuristic framework for understanding why individuals engage with media, which means that it has stimulated a lot of research of both traditional and new media (Internet and social media) (Sheldon, 2015, p.21). Whereas traditional media are characterized by their mass-oriented and centralized mode of communication, new media has a predominantly individualized but multi-user and multi-centered media content production (Sucu, 2014, p. 33).

Importantly, the explanatory power of U&G becomes even more significant with the rise of digital platforms; indeed, it has become even more applicable and suitable for new media studies. These studies result in the addition of new gratifications to explain how individuals use social media McQuail (2010) also suggests that individuals transition from passive recipient to active participant engaging with platforms including Instagram, Tiktok, and Facebook.

The emergence of Social media has transformed communication practices. In this regard**,** scholars of mass communication refer to the uses and gratifications theory as a sub-tradition of media effects research (McQuail, 1994). For instance, most people watch television to get information or satisfy their entertainment needs, others use social network to build and maintain relationships.

Different platforms tend to satisfy different user needs. Facebook, for instance, is primary used for informational purposes, closely associated with relationship maintenance and social interaction, while YouTube serves both entertainment and practical needs (Hajdarmataj & Paksoy, 2022). The introduction of platforms such as TikTok and Instagram has added new

dimensions to this environment, especially through short-form content designed to generate immediate gratification. Studies indicate that such platforms rely on algorithms that constantly provide personalized content, addressing users' appetite for immediate content consumption and emotional gratification .This illustrates a significant evolution in how younger generations consume with media.

Despite its value as an analytical framework, Uses and Gratifications Theory necessitates a critical awareness with its fundamental limitations. The theory assumes that users are rational and make conscious choices, in other words, people choose media to satisfy their pre-existing needs yet, According to Alter (2017), social media platforms actively influence user behavior by creating new needs and desires. As a result, it becomes difficult to distinguish between needs that are personal choice and those influenced by the system. Uses and Gratifications theory remains a comprehensive and adaptable approach for understanding media use in both traditional and digital contexts. However, its application in social media analysis requires critical awareness.

2.1.2 Reception Theory: How Users Interpret Social Media Content

Use and Gratifications Theory, Reception Theory both underline how engaged audiences are with media. They assume people do not just sit back and absorb what they see because they play the role as an active audience. They pick and select the media they want, based on their preferences and circumstances. These theories claim that our backgrounds and life experiences affect how we understand media. Which means audience by their interpretations can get different meanings from the same message. It is all about how each person sees things.

While both theories impose the active role of audiences in engaging with media, but they differ in two main questions, first Use and Gratifications tackle WHY individuals actively select media to fulfill their needs. In the other hand Reception theory, discuss on HOW audiences interpret and extract meaning from media.

Reception Theory also called Audience Reception Theory or Reader-Response Theory. It is all about how people understand and find meaning in media messages. This theory emphasizes the active role of the audience in interpreting media content. It display that media is not just a one-size-fits-all deal. Instead, viewers or readers bring their own social, cultural, and personal experiences into the mix.

In 1973, the cultural theorist and political activist, Stuart Hall presented his model of communication in his essay “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse”. His reception theory describes how producers use various signs to encode a program’s meaning, according to their ideologies and resources, then decoded by the viewers, who have to interpret the message through their own body of knowledge.

Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding Theory suggests that audience form their own meaning from media texts. These meanings can be dominant, negotiated or oppositional. Audiences are active in decoding media messages. Reception Theory addresses how people understand media messages in three main ways. First, the dominant-hegemonic position occurs when viewers completely agree with what the intended meaning developed by the media. Negotiated position, when the reader partially accepts parts of the message but adapts it to local conditions, personal experience, and beliefs. The Oppositional Reading: The reader understands the message but reject it based on his or her own values. The model of encoding/decoding remains one of the most powerful tools in media. It is a way of thinking about the communication process, which prioritizes audience and culture.

Digital platforms have profoundly transformed the way audiences receive and interpret content, which makes Reception Theory particularly relevant for studying social media. According to Kor (2018), the digital age has transformed the relationship between media texts and their audiences in a manner that previous theories of reception did not anticipate. In traditional media, audience reception was largely private and invisible. In other words, a viewer could accept, negotiate, or reject a message, but this interpretive act left no trace and had no effect on the content itself. Social media has changed this process. As Kor (2018, p. 56) argues, audiences can now interact directly by commenting, sharing, or simply engaging with social media content, this allows them to stay visible and play an active role in the meaning-making process.

2.3 Social Media as Communication Environments

Assessing the evolution of communication systems is crucial to contextualize the role of social media today, and considering the historical development of communication structures. This section acknowledges the transition from mass communication to a digital communication environment, then explaining the concept of mass self-communication, and finally discovering how social media influences a person's identity and self-perception.

2.3.1 Communication before Social Media: Mass Communication Theories.

It is difficult to locate the definitive origins of the term 'mass communication'. Chaffee and Rogers (1997) claim that the concept is associated to Rockefeller Foundation, John Marshall, who was instrumental between the 1930s and 1950s in supporting communication research and bringing together scholars from united states of America interested in communication research. Similarly, Buxton (1994) argues that Marshall's use of mass communication in a 1940 memorandum might mark one of the earliest uses of the term as an analytical concept. However, mass communication field existed before this period, references found in (see Hettinger, 1935; Kaempffert, 1931).

Mass communication is the process of transmitting messages or information to a large number of fragmented audiences, through media channels like television, newspapers, radio and magazines. These channels are organized to produce and distribute information on a wide scale. Following this model, unidirectional communication (also called linear or non-transactional communication) is when information flows in a single direction, from sender to receiver, with limited chance for immediate feedback or interaction, unlike bidirectional communication that is reciprocal. This unidirectional form of communication is characterized by the absence of dialogue or real time exchange. Where institutions held the authority to create and distribute information, and the receiver remain as a passive consumer who has no ability to influence or interact with the message.

Mass communication theories are classified in various ways. The fact that theoretical frameworks evolve in response to broader technological, political, and social conditions. Many scholars classify these theories based on historical evolution of mass media. This approach is appropriate in my thesis because the role and influence of media have changed over time, especially with new technologies.

This classical communication model was not neutral. It is controlled by normative frameworks and rules, retains great power due to its high credibility and its role in establishing global trust. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) proposed and wrote normative theories of the press in their book called "Four Theories of the Press" (1963). According to these authors, the normative theories of the press are authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and the soviet/communist media. The four theories of the press illustrate this relationship between media and power, regardless of their political context. Mass media functioned as an institutional tool that shaped the public opinion and behavior. The key distinction is that the influence came from established media institutions like (press, television, and radio). Audiences were aware that they consume information from identifiable sources, and the power of authority to influence public discourse was concentrated in the hands of clearly identifiable actors.

To begin with, authoritarian theory is the oldest of the four normative theories of the press. It was adopted in the United Kingdom (England) in the 16th to 17th Century (White, 2009, p. 56). In the late renaissance period, the aristocratic mode of governance was mostly dominant; those at the top of social hierarchy hold authority, while lower groups have limited power. During this period, the communication was top-down. It means that the government have the full control of what people consume, through the media channels (Siebert et al., 1956). Besides this, media's power is very restricted, cannot criticize authority, not allowed to have a full independence especially national channels.

The Libertarian Theory; also called free press theory originally came as opposed to authoritarian theory around the 16th century, Fredrick S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm. Argued that media should be self-regulated. The theory rests on the idea that people should have free space to express their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs without any interference from the government or ruling party (White, 2009, p. 26). John Milton, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Jefferson asserted the human beings should be free to share the best ideas and values from any form of censorship and have a free editorial independence. This period of enlightenment, many people were proclaiming the freedom of expression, freedom of religions, freedom of trade and movement. In the libertarian system, attacks on the government's policies are fully accepted and even encouraged, and there should be no restrictions on the import or export of media messages across national frontiers (Siebert et al., 1956).

In the mid-twentieth century following the work of the Commission on Freedom of the Press, an American initiative brought the social responsibility theory, represents a modification of the libertarian model. Protesting that excessive freedom of press does not serve the public interest, without considering the responsibility of what press publish and its effects on society

.As opposed to the Libertarian theory, the social responsibility principal holds that media organizations bear certain obligations to society. Obligations expressed around the values of truthfulness, accuracy, balance, and objectivity. More precisely, journalist is accountable to his audience as well as the government. The goal of the social responsibility system, as Siebert writes, is that media as a whole should be pluralized, indicating a reflection of the diversity of society as well as access to various points of view (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 74).

The Soviet Communist Theory rooted in the 1917 revolution of the Soviet Union and the writings of Marx and Engels, according to Marxist-Leninist the media organizations in this system exist to serve the interests of the working class, reinforce the objectives of socialist party. The soviet system would appear similar as the authoritarian model, since both theories, the government controls the media and criticism not allowed; together called as totalitarian theories. Nevertheless, in the authoritarian theory, the press is subordinate to but formally separate from the state, the Soviet model merges them into unified body. In other words, The Soviet or Communist media; the government hold the authority to control all kind of media, everything belongs to the state. The Government attempts to provide information, education, entertainment, motivation, and mobilization in order to establish a socialized society.

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, this model still exist in China, where the communist government continues to execute direct control over their media institutions from television, radio, to the press (McQuail, 2005).

A number of scholars have criticized the relevance of the four theories of press, due to the penetration of the internet and social media. In this new era, people have the option to select any news and sometimes-local people are becoming citizen journalists using their smartphone and other digital tools. This means that the new media era has created a free space where individuals can share or express his/her views without fearing the standards, norms and values established by the loyal families or governments.

From my perspective of this research study, what is particularly significant, the classical model of communication laid the groundwork for what Jeffres (2015) described as the manipulation of public knowledge through controlled media. Classical mass communication theories, such as cultivation, uses and gratifications, and agenda setting, each illustrated how media influence the perception of reality. Agenda-setting theory’s idea, the media influence public priorities by broadcasting certain information, making the audiences perceive them as important. Cultivation theory argued that repeated exposure to media content gradually change audiences' perceptions of the world. As for uses and gratifications theory, was already discussed in the previous section.

These ideas are directly relevant to understanding the influence of social media on digital consumers, because it did not appear in isolation. It inherited the mechanism of influence originating in classical mass communication. Jeffres (2015) demonstrated, the main distinction is that new technologies began to minimize the boundaries between producers and receivers. The decline of unidirectional Communication used in the classical model. With the rise of social media platforms, individuals are no longer passive consumers, they are UGC (User- Generated Content) where forms of content is created by these users, who actively participate in the circulation of media content online . It is indeed the discovery of a new chaos, a new communication system where influence became simultaneously more complex and sophisticated, functioning not through the traditional media decisions, but through algorithmic design and a much customized content. It is essential to consider that social media should be viewed as, extension, and evolution of traditional communication theories.

2.3.2 From Mass Communication to Mass Self-Communication

Traditional media with unidirectional path, TV and radio broadcasting or print newspapers are losing market shares in many countries and regions to new, interactive, bidirectional way, digital media, social networking sites such as Instagram, Tiktok, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. In order to understand the nature and extent of this shift, The Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells introduced the concept of mass self-communication to explain the new form of communication enabled by digital networks (Castells, 2009). Unlike traditional mass communication, where power was concentrated in a small group of identifiable institutions broadcast content to large passive audiences, mass self-communication allows individuals to create their own messages, share them to potentially global audiences, and receive content from millions of other creators simultaneously. Castells' analysis begins by developing the concept of the network society, a new form of social structure organized around digital networks. In this new society, information is the most valuable resource, the production, and circulation of information constitutes the main source of power and productivity (Castells & Cardoso, 2006).

Castells defines mass self-communication as a new form of communication, distinct from both mass communication and interpersonal with the potential to reach global audiences. The main characteristic of mass self-communication is that content is now self-generated, users can create their own content via chosen software or sites, self-directed in emission, and actively

select the messages they consume (Castells, 2009, p. 55). In other words, any individual with a smart phone and Wi-Fi can create and share an information ,in different forms whether a text post , a video or audio recording without seeking any approval from an accrediting organization. The second characteristic, self-directed emission refers to the capacity of individuals to retain full control over what is produced, to whom it is directed, and choose the form as well as the destination of their intended message.

As for self-selected reception, the audience's possess the free will to consume whatever they prefer. Unlike classical mass communication, where audience had limited control over content selection. According to castells, self-selection does not eliminate the influence because social media creates the impression of free choice. Algorithmic curation, this term means filtering and sorting content so that only a selection reaches you. It is making decisions on your behalf, determines what appears first on your feed based on engagement data and commercial interests of the platform.

Building on this idea Henry Jenkins, claims in his famous book Convergence Culture (2006), that digital media has developed the concept of participatory culture. Digital media transformed the relationship between producers and consumers as active participants who interact with each other, create and recirculate content according to a new set of rules; they are no longer separate activities but two sides of the same practice. The author presents further evidence that the boundary between producer and consumer has effectively dissolved, replaced by a new model of active participation, content flows and circulates in multiple directions from users who are simultaneously creators, distributors, and audiences.

This participatory culture does not function in unbiased circumstances. José van Dijck, in The Culture of Connectivity (2013), contends that social media platforms are not designed to allow self-expression without exchange; they are commercial systems that exploit user’s interactions for data extraction and monetization. Van Dijck, theorizes connectivity that is different from the social value of human connection, connectedness. Connectivity the automated, form of connections that are engineered and manipulated.

Diving deeper into this argument, Ruckenstein's dimension focus on how users personally experience this ecosystem. In The Feel of Algorithms (2022), she reveals the complexity of these algorithms. They are perceived as intimate and personal forces. Users feel that platforms possess deep knowledge of their preferences, sometimes anticipating their interests before they consciously recognize them. Despite this, Ruckenstein and Granroth (2020) claims, the feeling of being unique and understood entails a cost, as it is created by systems that simultaneously collecting and exploiting personal data to make profit. They describe this double-edged sword as the intimacy of surveillance. On one side, platforms seem personal and trustworthy, on the other side, they are actually benefiting from user's data for advertisement purposes.

This reality significantly affects social media user's behavior. Every interaction on a platform including liking, sharing content, or scrolling in general, yield data for personalized content. As Henry Jenkins (2006) clarified, the participatory potential of digital media coexists with the concentration of few companies that control most platforms, which restricts true participation and limits the diversity of content available to users. The freedom that mass self-communication appears to provide is real but restricted.

2.3.3 Digital Identity and Self-perception

Between real and virtual world there is an ongoing tension, which is the struggle of identities. According to Stuart hall (1996), identity is not fixed or stable; it is a dynamic process where elements are constantly changing, that define the distinctiveness of each individual. The digital world has created a new identity, the online version of the physical identity of a person (Cover, 2016). In this new world, individuals consist of maintaining two types of identity: the first kept private which indicates who we truly are, the second influenced by the visibility on social media .For instance, many users lives under the social pressure of digital platforms, forcing them to present idealized version of themselves (Turkle, 2011).

Presenting Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation (Impression management), claims that individuals behave like performers in social life, controlling how other users perceive them. This means, users act as performers on the front stage, while on the back stage they reveal their identity. This distinction becomes more complex on social media, as users create idealized version of themselves online, to appear unique, attractive and grasp attention. They selectively share precious moments of their lives in order to create a desirable or socially

accepted impression, while in the back stage they adjust their self-presentation or imperfections away from the audience. For example, a Moroccan couple seem happily married on Instagram or Tiktok, yet shortly afterward, their relationship end unexpectedly.

Building on Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management. On social media, people do not only manage impressions in direct interactions, as Goffman originally described. According to Papacharissi, (2011), Users create and maintain an online version of themselves through videos, posts and comments that remain publicly accessible. This new process is referred to as digital identity. It is important to note that, users do not develop this identity freely because algorithms systems provide feedback (likes, comments, shares and follower counts); these visible answers allow individuals to measure social approval immediately. Receiving positive or negative feedback from audiences will help users to adjust their posts, images, and how they project themselves online. In the long term, this process changes the basic standards users follow and even the type of content they consider acceptable. Social media do not provide neutral spaces for users to express themselves, using rewards in specific forms of self-presentation while limiting others is proving how these platforms manipulate how individuals develop their digital identities (Papacharissi, 2011).

Aristotle (1954), in Rhetoric extends this idea by introducing the concept of Ethos, defined as the character and credibility of the speaker to gain approval of others. This concept take a new form on social media since individuals are more concerned about other's judgments, while platforms enhance this issue by offering constant feedback (like, comments and followers). This ecosystem drives people to invest their time creating the perfect image that others will appreciate; often at the expense of authenticity (Abbas & Dervin, 2019) .The construction of digital identity does not occur in isolation from culture. As Bouazza (2008) explains in his analysis, individuals navigate two needs: the desire for belonging to a social group and the desire for distinction or differentiate themselves. On social media, both needs are expressed publicly, measured through engagement metrics, and evaluated using peer feedback.

For digital consumers in cultural contexts marked by strong community values, family expectations and changing norms around gender and self-expression, these processes are significant and influential. In his proposal, this balance requires individuals to adjust between cultural expectations, platform incentives, which do not always align .This conflict represents a major challenge of digital self- presentation in such context, and it increases the complexity of social media and consumer behavior.

2.4: Mechanisms of Influence in Social Media

While technology has become an important factor for organizational competitiveness, Social media platforms do not attract and maintain billions of users by chance. Rather, their capacity to capture attention and encourage repetitive engagement results from intentional design choices made by engineers and behavioral scientists. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial to explain why social media influence is so powerful, and difficult to resist especially among young adults like Moroccan university students.

In this regard, Adam Alter (2017) a social psychologist provides an important detailed analysis of this process in his book Irresistible. Alter, argues that obsessive utilize is not due to individual weakness or lack of self- discipline, but instead to systems intentionally designed to create it.Within the design framework, an important psychological mechanism known as variable reward scheduling hold an extremely significant role. This mechanism originally identified in the context of gambling addiction, functions by rewarding users unpredictably. For instance, a post receives high number of likes, while in others it receives very few; similarly, a notification may appear when the user opens the application, while at other times no new updates are available. As Alter (2017, p. 8) emphasizes that unpredictable rewards is what makes the behavior irresistible, users check Instagram or TikTok daily, to find something interesting, but they have no idea when it will happen. This uncertainty encourages repeated checking; a repetition that becomes a habit, as the brain learns to seek these rewards automatically because the platform has activated a neurological behavior that is difficult to interrupt. The above argument, confirms that social media platforms are not accidently engaging, instead they intentionally designed to maintain user attention. Nicholas Carr (2010), in his book The Shallows, adds a critical cognitive dimension; he states that sustained internet use is neurologically reconfiguring human cognition. The constant interruptions, shorts, and fragmented content of digital platforms systematically reduce the capacity for deep attention and encourage shallow. The Net, created to serve as an interruption system; Carr (2010, p. 131)
To illustrate how the algorithmic logic function, Dominique Cardon (2015), identifies four types of algorithms their differences based on the kind of value they calculate.

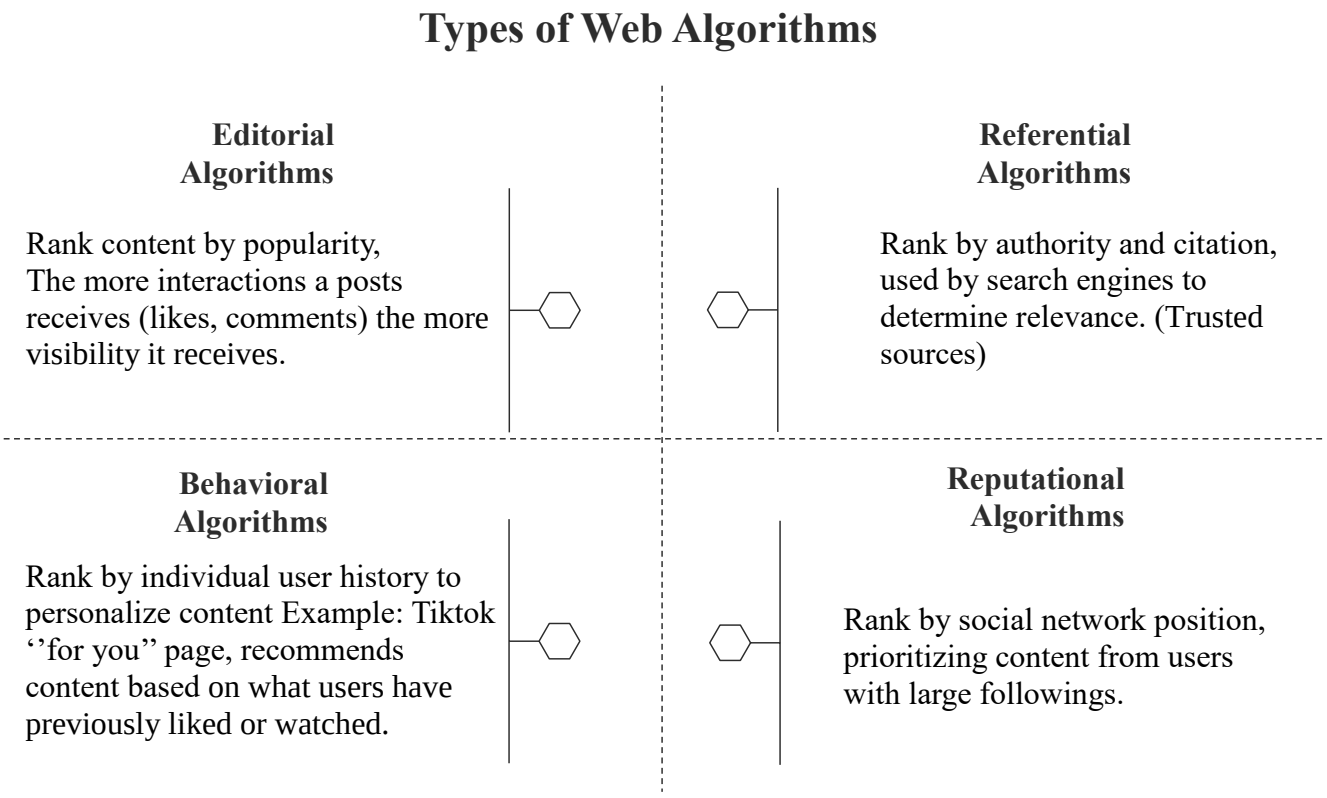
Types of Web Algorithms
Editorial Algorithms
Rank content by popularity, The more interactions a posts receives (likes, comments) the more visibility it receives.
Referential Algorithms
Rank by authority and citation, used by search engines to determine relevance. (Trusted sources)
Behavioral Algorithms
Rank by individual user history to personalize content Example: Tiktok ''for you'' page, recommends content based on what users have previously liked or watched.
Reputational Algorithms
Rank by social network position, prioritizing content from users with large followings.

Figure 1. *Overview of the four types of Algorithm by Dominique Cardon*

The foregoing analysis explains why you see certain content and how it affects your behavior and choices. As Cardon (2015, p. 43) argues, once the platform relies on editorial algorithms, they privilege content based on popularity, thereby enhancing users to follow dominant trends. Behavioral algorithms in contrast, deliver personalized content grounded in users' prior interactions, over time it forms their preferences. Reputational algorithms prioritize content from users with large fan base to reinforce the hierarchies of social status. Referential algorithms organize content according to authority and credibility, influencing what users perceive as reliable and trusted sources.

Another crucial mechanism is the filter bubble, Eli Pariser (2011), defines this concept as the tendency of algorithms to present content that aligns with users' existing beliefs and preferences. This process limits content diversity and creates an environment that reinforces users' existing views. In terms of consumption, platforms use personalized suggestions for products, trends, and influencers, which seem organic but influenced by users' past activity. According to Eytan Bakshy and colleagues (2015) clarifies that this effect is not absolute, as users' own choices also influence what they perceive. Algorithms determine our online experiences, but digital consumers still maintain some level of control over their content, making this process more complex.

2.5: Social Media and Behavioral Change

This section is devoted to the literature review adopted in this research to investigate behavioral change as one of the most visible and measurable effects of social media. This analysis relies on the perspectives of Social Learning Theory and Social Comparison Theory.

2.5.1 Social Comparison Theory: Measuring Oneself against Others

In everyday life, individuals tend to compare themselves to others in different situations, including the workplace, and social life. Through these experiences, people become aware of their differences in many aspects. This process is referred to as social comparison, a concept introduced by Festinger (1954), and further described by Wood (1996, pp. 520–521) as "the process of thinking about information about one or more other people in relation to the self."

Social Comparison Theory, originally founded by Festinger (1954), based on the assumption of how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others. He explored how environmental factors influence individual opinions and lead to conformity. Festinger also argued that communication within groups encourages agreement, which is essential for facilitating cooperation and for creating a common social reality that enable individuals to validate their beliefs.

Social comparison is divided into two main forms: comparison of ability and comparison of opinion. Comparison of ability focuses on achievements and performance, often involving judgment and competition, as individuals seek to determine how well they are doing relative to others (Festinger, 1954; Suls et al., 2002; Yang et al., 2018). On the other hand, social comparison of opinion involves the comparison of thoughts, attitudes, values, and beliefs, without the judgments and competition found in ability comparison. For example, choosing a dress for an event, we tend to observes others' styles to decide what is appropriate.

Beyond this, he underlined the main role of individuals in the development of personal opinions. Suggesting that social characteristics, such as success, intelligence, or attractiveness, cannot be measured objectively, For instance, when there is a clear measure people judge their performance in the exam or a race directly without needing to compare with others. This indicates that social comparison becomes more crucial in circumstances where things are not clear or cannot be evaluated easily. In this sense, self-perception is developed through

interactions with others, as individuals understand and define themselves by referring to people around them who serve as a source of comparison.

2.5.2 Social comparison theory in social networking sites

Festinger (1954) was the first to propose the Social comparison theory. This theory has two different focus areas. The first area is Selection, choosing a comparison target; the second area is Reaction, the effect of the comparison on affect and self-evaluation (Gerber et al., 2018; Tandon et al., 2024). People judge themselves by looking at others, Festinger in his Social Comparison Theory; helps explain how social media influences the way individuals evaluate themselves. According to this theory, people first choose who they compare themselves with, and reacting to that comparison through changes in self-evaluation and emotions (Gerber et al., 2018; Tandon et al., 2024). These comparisons can occur in different directions: upward comparison, when individuals evaluate themselves against others perceived as superior in social hierarchy; downward comparison, where individuals compare themselves with those perceived as inferior or less successful. Social comparison theory adds another, which involves comparison with others considered similar in relevant characteristic.

On social media, comparisons are mostly upward because users tend to share only the best moments of their lives and present an idealized version of their lives, focusing on positive content and sharing only the best moments (Latif et al., 2021). Social media increase the frequency and intensity of comparison; this exposure to higher standards influences how individuals perceive themselves. Such comparison effect negatively their self-perception. This emotional response can either motivate self-improvement or result in frustration (Van de Ven et al., 2009; Latif et al., 2021).

Research shows that frequent comparison on social media is associated with lower self-esteem and overall well-being (Feinstein et al. 2013; Vogel et al., 2014).In addition, comparison based on abilities, like achievements and success tend to produce more negative outcomes than comparisons based on opinions (Ozimek et al., 2023). Consequently, social media strengthens social comparison processes and plays a significant role in influencing individuals' self-perceptions.

2.5.3 Social Learning Theory: Observing, Imitating, and Adopting New Behaviors

Based on previous studies, Learning is defined as a lasting change in behavior, knowledge or performance resulting from interaction with the environment (Driscoll, 1994; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986; Shuell, 1986). This definition shows that learning is a continuous process based on external influences. In fact, the environment has a major effect on individual development, (Bandura, 1977). Over time, scholars have classified learning theories into three main approaches to explain how learning occurs, behaviorism, Social Learning Theory (SLT), and Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT).

Unlike behaviorist theories that focus mainly on direct reinforcement, Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn new behaviors through observation and interaction with others. Bandura emphasized, that learning could occur indirectly by observing others and the consequences of their actions .In 1961, He demonstrated this through the famous Bobo doll experiment, where children were supposed to observe an adult acting aggressively toward a doll. Later on, they get to experience the same act with the same doll, and many of them reproduced similar aggressive behavior, this proves that children were imitating the behavior they had observed earlier. *The Bobo Doll* experiment reveals that imitation may occurs even in the absence of instructions, reward or encouragement.

This process, known as observational learning, based on four essential stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. More precisely, individuals must first observe the behavior, then remember it, and have the ability the produce it. However, observing a behavior is not sufficient; individuals also need a motivation to imitate it. Therefore, learning does not occur automatically, but depends on cognitive factors, social factors including rewards, approval, and environmental conditions that determine whether the behavior will be adopted.

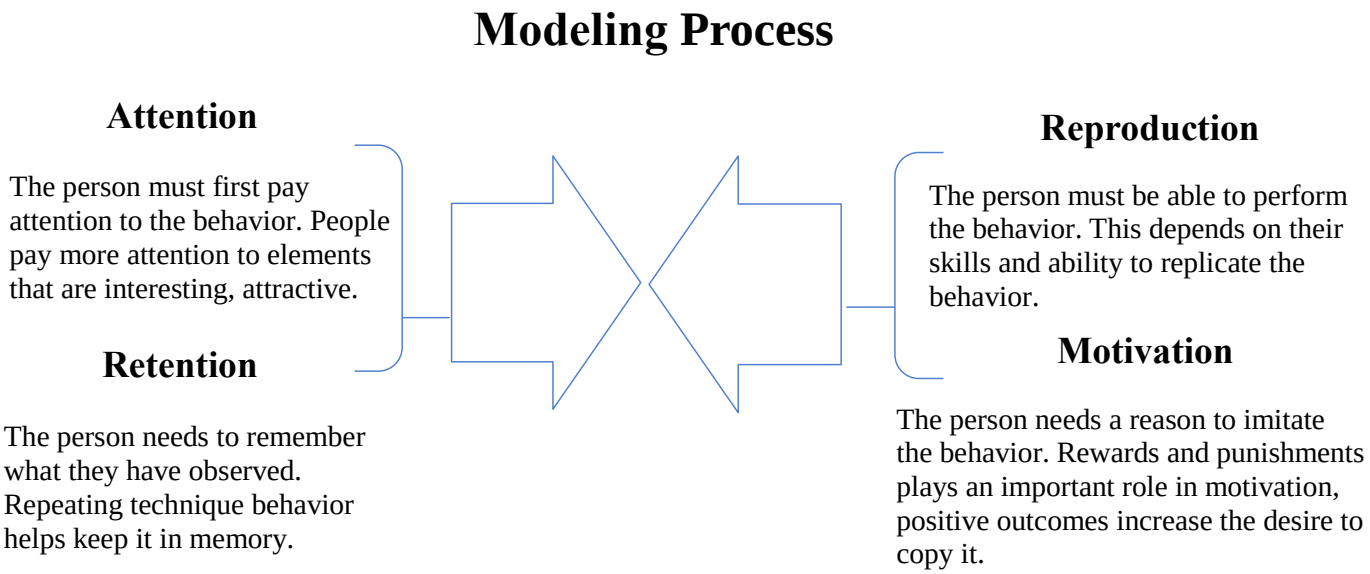
Modeling Process
Attention
The person must first pay attention to the behavior. People pay more attention to elements that are interesting, attractive.
Retention
The person needs to remember what they have observed. Repeating technique behavior helps keep it in memory.
Reproduction
The person must be able to perform the behavior. This depends on their skills and ability to replicate the behavior.
Motivation
The person needs a reason to imitate the behavior. Rewards and punishments plays an important role in motivation, positive outcomes increase the desire to copy it.

Figure 2. *The four stages of observational learning.*

Social media has established one of the most powerful environments for observational learning that has ever existed. On Instagram and TikTok, influencers function as behavioral models in a manner consistent with Bandura's theoretical framework. Influencers present different types of behaviors, including purchasing specific products, adopting aesthetic styles, using distinctive language. These behaviors are rewarded through follower growth, brand collaborations, engagement metrics (number of likes and comments), and audience reach.

Digital consumers often engage with multiple influencer's content and, through continuous exposure in the daily basis, gradually grasp aspects of their lifestyle. Influencers are often perceived as role models, leading to imitation. Despite the personal values they represent, influencer's credibility and impact strongly depend on the size of their follower base, engagement metrics, and content visibility. The extent of their popularity become the key indicators of their life success, leading users to focus more on visibility than on the quality or authenticity of the behaviors presented, this explains why individuals are redefining their identity and self-perception to resemble their social media role model. Social media platforms are virtual spaces where people can fake their identity to look interesting and attractive, creating the impression that these representations reflect their true reality.

Based on the above discussion SCLT is a learning theory, which has come out on the ideas that people learn by observing human's behavior, Albert Bandura (1986) later extended this model into Social Cognitive Theory, an evolution and expansion of Social Learning Theory, clarifying that people are not only passive observes but also thinkers, capable of controlling their behavior.

In This theory, Bandura defined the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to the person's belief in his or her own capacity to perform certain behavior. On social media, self-efficacy is illustrated through the content created by influencers. For instance, macro-influencers often create video tutorials on how to use products, style outfits, or cooking content. These types of content are the most viewed in social media and commonly perceived as realistic and achievable by digital consumers. Indeed, Individuals develop greater confidence in their capacity adopt same lifestyle, which encourages imitation (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011).

2.6: Contextual framework: Social media in Morocco

Global communication technologies have transformed the world into a global village, prioritized external events at the expense of local realities and domestic concerns. According to some scholars, while these technologies provide youth with opportunities to thrive in an interconnected world, they may also exert a disturbing impact on their behavior, communication practices and mental health (Carr & Hayes, 2015). The Internet, recognized as a global network of connected computer systems and information channels, the expansion of the internet has paved the way for a new term, Social media that refers to the use of the internet or mobile-based platforms enables individuals to interact with others in real-time or asynchronously (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Why Morocco? This question motivated the initial reflection of this research. Morocco is far from being a passive receiver or observer of this new social order called the network society (Castells, 2005). It is a society undergoing a fast, complex technological transformation that is changing people's social habits and identities especially for its younger generations. In recent decades, Morocco has undergone one of the most significant digital transformations in the African and Arab world. According to the Digital 2025 Morocco Report by DataReportal, the Moroccan population had an estimated 35.3 million internet users, this data represent internet penetration rate of approximately 92% of the global population, and a significant growth compared 62% in 2017. It appears that, the majority of Internet users in Morocco 21.3 million are social media users, comprising about 55.5% of the population. Several writers and journalists within and outside Morocco agreed upon the fact that the majority of the Moroccan youth place their trust in social media and disregard the traditional media. As Ilahiane's work implies the role of mobile devices in enabling social media expansion. He also criticized the cultural meanings embedded in mobile technologies are closely related to how individuals use them, Chris Barker (1999) also states that these technologies influence not only communication but create many resources for people to construct their social identities. Which explains the intensive use of social media platforms in Morocco.

In the late 1990s digital communication was mainly text based and limited to a very few educated urban minorities. According to Azizi (2019), the development of digital communication and the spread of connected devices has created a new form of expression different from the official, state- mediated discourse that had long been integrated in Moroccans lives. The emergence of social media platforms made this digital environment accessible to a larger segment of the population. Facebook as the first platforms to penetrate Moroccan market has retained its position with nearly 75% of active users monthly. Instagram coming second around 70% of internet users in the third quarter of 2023, while other platforms YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok, shifting from unidirectional communication where individuals were passive consumers of top-down information into active participants in public communication processes.

The evolution of social media in Morocco is marked by platform diversity and disparities between generations. Facebook maintain its dominant position with approximately 20.5 million users in early 2024, meanwhile Instagram is very popular among young adults with around 11.9 million users, becoming the main platform for self-presentation and visual content. Whereas WhatsApp functions as the core of communication among all ages. YouTube maintain its position as the leading platform for long-form content. Tiktok becoming the fastest growing reaching 12.4 million users aged 18 and above in early 2024, representing 47.3% of Moroccan young adults (DataReportal, 2024). Every platform holds its own algorithmic logic, and students interact with several platforms daily. In the digital world an important aspect of social media use deserves attention is Moroccan students are being exposed to fake news or misinformation online. Research conducted by Mrah and Tizaoui (2018) revealed that many young users are vulnerable to misinformation due to excessive information and weak digital literacy skills. Perhaps this weakness will limits their ability to evaluate online content, as by El Kandoussi (2023), states that Moroccan students believe they can evaluate information critically, but their online behavior indicates limited ability to verify sources. These findings are important for this study, as it suggests that social media influence based on algorithms, social comparison, and observational learning occurs in environment where most of the consumed content remains unverified, or intentionally misleading.

Social media has reconfigured current conceptualizations of identity, as described by Harry T. Dyer (2020 the term identity is not stable, it is perpetually constructed through these platforms. In Morocco, the notion identity holds a significant role in social life, cultural values, and beliefs. According to Schulthies (2021), Moroccan identity has always been formed through multiple communication channels, ranging from traditional storytelling to television to social network. Presenting her concept of "channeling Moroccanness," Schulthies explains that collective identity is not passively inherited but actively expressed through the dominant communication channel of each period. Across all the different forms of communication, social media is now considered as the main platform in which Moroccan identity is negotiated and redefined.

This negotiation of identity is explicitly linguistic. The Moroccan society linguistically is diverse, although the degree of its linguistic complexity and diversity is less extensive than other African countries, the coexistence of a variety of languages; each with its own unique social status serves different functions and purposes in society, Zouhir, A. (2013). Moroccan social media users are multilingual citizens, communicate using Arabic, French, Tamazight, and Darija sometimes in the same setting. Schulthies (2021) explains how these multilingual tensions, are intensified instead of being reduced by digital media, these several languages coexist and compete for legitimacy and visibility online. Modern standard Arabic is associated with state institutions, French preferred for its social status and prestige also remains important in Morocco's education system, Darija, or mother tongue occupies everyday communication, as for the Amazigh language continue to pursue equal recognition and visibility after years of marginalization in mainstream media.

Aabi's (2020) research, grounded in Conceptual Blending Theory, argues that young Moroccans blend Islamic cultural references with Western influences to produce hybrid online content that is humorous, critical, and identity reinforcing at the same time. These practices go beyond simple code switching reflecting a complex cultural identity in which no single language or one stable identity framework is entirely adequate. The distinctiveness of Moroccan identity is defined by a strong sense of belonging both inside and outside the borders; youth develop their identities through the family cohesion, Islamic values and the national attachment. These significant components continue to influence youth identity while intersecting with global digital culture (Sabri, 2021). Based on recent research (2025), the production of meaning in Moroccan society has changed from the classical institutions, such as family, mosque, school

as well to digital environment where diverse and sometimes conflicting discourses spread rapidly. This transformation is further documented by Zyad's analysis (2023), observed how youth mobilized through social media to organize the 2018 national boycott, illustrating that these platforms do not function only for self-expression but also as mechanism for collective action that reshape the public sphere in real time.

From my personal observation and perspective, while regularly scrolling through social media platforms in Morocco, I have noticed the dominance of negative, dramatic and sensationalist content in what becomes viral online. The circulation of content is characterized by the prevalence of fights, fake rumors, public shaming, and influence drama, which apparently attract more attention and engagement than educational and culturally enriching content.

Researchers and psychologists relate this behavior to Negativity bias, the human tendency to react more on negative over positive information Baumeister (2001). People use their natural instinct and react more emotionally to social conflict, controversy or danger, making this type of content easy to grasp attention and become visible on social media platforms. Rathje (2021) confirms that negative content is more likely to spread online. Social media algorithms exploit this process by prioritizing content that triggers emotional reactions. For instance, Instagram engagement-based algorithms have increased the visibility of emotionally charged content, and users exposed to algorithmic-curated feeds report feelings of anger and anxiety compared to those receiving chronological content, (Milli et al., 2024). Although, other platforms such as Facebook, twitter use different algorithms, but they function under similar mechanism. Brady (2020) argues that anger-provoking content receives higher engagement, leading the platform to design its ranking system around emotional provocation. Influencers and content creators intentionally use social conflict, controversy and emotional engagement as a growth strategy, to enhance visibility and engagement. Brady (2020) described this process as the outrage economy. In Morocco users 'daily feeds are saturated with conflict and sensationalism regardless of their own stated preferences, does not mean that Moroccan users are naturally drawn to negativity, but because the global platform tend to reward emotionally charged content, given the social and cultural tensions provide rich supply of emotionally charged content and widespread engagement.

Chapter two conclusion

After reviewing these theories together, I arrived at the same realization: social media influence cannot be restricted to a single explanation. It does not result only from algorithms manipulating users, nor from people making independent choices. It is a more complex process than either of these explanations and that is precisely what makes it a significant topic worth studying. This chapter indicates that social media influence begins long before users access their devices. It starts with the way these platforms are designed or built, as Casilli (2019), and van Dijck and Poell (2013) illustrate, main goal is to grasp attention and convert it into profit. Users may or may not be aware of the algorithm systems, but these systems are not just a reflection of user choice, designed to keep users engaged for a long period.

Platforms alone do not account social media influence, as it constitute only one dimension of this crisis. The social processes emerge within the environments in which users compare themselves to others by evaluating their lives, worth and achievement against the idealized content they are exposed to online (Festinger, 1954).Observational learning was also crucial in social media influence . People adopt new behaviors and values through observing other content creators sometimes without being fully conscious of this process (Bandura, 1977). Users create and maintain an idealized online version of themselves through videos, posts and comments that remain publicly accessible (Goffman, 1959; Papacharissi, 2011).

We have reviewed the Moroccan context. Factors such as digital growth, cultural values, linguistic diversity, misinformation, and algorithmic systems all affect the way people use and experience social media. These factors make the Moroccan context different from previous studies which dealt with Western contexts. This specificity, together with the limited research that examines these dimensions as a whole, highlights the importance of the present study. Holding numerous dimensions in parallel, this theoretical literature has changed my assumptions in this research. What once appeared invisible is now revealed through these theories, which gave me the tools to comprehend the system behind the experience. This is what the research-based investigation in the next chapter is intended to evaluate.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and justify the methodological choices applied in this research to address to the research questions, the influence of social media on communication practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioral change among university students. It presents the research approach, philosophical orientation that guided the study, purpose, and description of the strategy adopted. Along with a discussions of the methods that were irrelevant. Also, the data collection methods and sampling strategy, and procedures taken to ensure the reliability of the founding data. The chapter concludes limitations of the research methodology adopted, to provide a critical knowledge of the study.

3.1. Research Design

Research design is defined as the blueprint that guides the process of data collection, measurement, and data analysis, Cooper & Schindler (2014). It constitute main structure of the research ensuring that the data collected are capable of responding to the questions posed. The most appropriate approach for this study is the quantitative research design. This approach relies on the systematic collection of numerical data, which allows the researcher to measure variables and describe, in an objective manner (Bryman, 2016). The respondents of this study are Ibn Zohr University in Agadir students from different faculties such as, FLASH, ESEFA, and FSJES.

Data were collected using, self-administered online questionnaire distributed online to undergraduate, Master's, and doctoral students in different faculties of Ibn Zohr University. The questionnaire incorporated a combination of both closed-ended responses, including multiple choice and Likert-scale questions, and one single open-ended question intended to allow participants or students to express their thoughts and share opinions, which will provide complementary insights and contextual depth to the analysis. The idea of choosing an online survey was consistent with digital nature of the research topic; facilitate the geographical distribution of students from various faculties, also the advantages it offers in terms of time and cost-effectiveness.

3.2. Research Question

The study design is guided by the research question. Its development must align with the main objectives, ensuring coherence and clear direction of any academic research. A precise research question identifies the focus of the study, determines boundaries, and guides methodological decisions (Creswell, 2014). This study is centered on the following main research question:

How do social media platforms, especially Instagram and Tiktok influence the communication practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioral patterns of university students at Ibn Zohr University in Morocco?

3.2.1 Sub-Research Question

Q1. How frequently students use social media platforms, and what are the main purposes and motivations for doing so?

Q2. How do students manage their self-perception and digital identity through their social media communication practices?

Q3. Are students aware of how the algorithmic mechanisms affect the content they are exposed to on social media platforms?

Q4. How do social media influence the opinions, habits, and behavior of students at Ibn Zohr University?

3.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives are essential in connecting the research problem to the research questions and the purpose of the study. These objectives are defined to develop clear and precise statement of the research. In this case, the aim extends beyond a one single definitive perspective, considering multiple dimensions that reveal the complexity of social media influence. As it focuses on university students' use of social media, their communication practices, self-presentation, as well as students' behavioral change. The following objectives of the research are associated with the research questions, sub-questions mentioned earlier:

1. To determine students social media usage habits, their preferences, time-consuming, and their main motivations.

2. To examine how students present themselves and interact on social media, focusing on how this exposure connected to their digital identity.

3. To evaluate students' conscious of platforms mechanism and algorithmic influence.

4. To analyze the role of social media platforms in shaping digital consumer perceptions, lifestyle choices, and daily life habits.

3.4. Research Hypotheses

Research hypotheses are provisional answers to the research questions. The purpose of this part is to demonstrate researcher's interests in a specific topic, and reflect his anticipated results based on previous theories and prior literature. Research hypotheses represent the researcher's commitment to either validate or refuse a set of assumptions through concrete evidence. In this study, there are three hypotheses:

H1: Social media communication has a measurable impact on users' communication practices.

H2: Algorithms and personalized content influence the way users construct their digital identity.

H3: Moroccan digital consumers show signs of dependency that affect their behavior and critical thinking.

3.5 Population of the Study

The population of this study is general users of social media who are using social media platforms. Yet, the target population comprised of students aged between 18 and 35 years, considering this segment as the most active users on digital platforms. Targeting students from multiple faculties in the Souss-Massa region of Morocco, at Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco. Although this study originated at the Faculty of Languages, Arts and Human Sciences (FLASH) in Ait Melloul. The data collection process expanded to cover seven universities and faculties .The survey distributed to include Faculty of Letters and Humanities (FLSH), the Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences (FSJES), the Faculty of Sciences Agadir (FSA), the Higher School of Education and Training (ESEFA), the Faculty of Sharia and Legal Studies, and the Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taroudant. To guarantee diversity and representativeness of the sample.

The implications of this research for Moroccan university students are direct. Social media's influence does not function as a neutral communication environment. Rather, Students engage in a digitally mediated sphere, algorithmically biased, toward privileging sensational and controversial content. This ecosystem determine students' perception of social life.

Analyzing this influence requires recognizing digital platforms as an active mechanism that impact everyday practices, and social interactions.

3.6 Research Instrument and Measures

The data collection instrument for this study were gathered through an online self-administered questionnaire, the survey is considered one of the most effective tools for quantitative data collection, especially in studies targeting populations from diverse locations (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This method allows the researcher to gather large enough responses from substantial number of participants in a short amount of time for obtaining statistical analysis of the results.

The study questionnaire used was developed exclusively for of this research, the instrument was reviewed and adjusted before distribution. To ensure clarity, and coherence with the research objectives. The survey is organized into six main sections, as explained below:

Section 1: Demographic Information

To begin with, the first section of the questionnaire, involves the collection of demographic aspects of Ibn Zohr students, including age, gender, level and field of study. Demographic data is crucial in this research method because it helps to investigate whether these factors are related to the main variables of the study. One of the questions concerns age, as it allows the researcher to better understand and describe the profile of the sample and reveal the particularities of each age category in relation to the topic. The university and level of study are also important as they provide the possibility to compare between different disciplines and level of study.

Section 2: Social Media Usage Habits

This second section is designed to establish clear understanding of students' daily social media practices. My intentions in this section is to identify students most frequently used platforms, also the average time spent on them per day. Through these questions, the aim is to provide a descriptive foundation data that illustrate the digital world experienced by students in their daily life routine. This step is essential to ground the rest of the analysis.

Section 3: Communication Practices

This section focuses on students' communication practices; specifically how they communicate and express themselves on social media. Gives priority to their self-perception, degree of authenticity of expression and their engagement with other content creators. To measure these dimensions, I employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (Strongly Disagree) to five (Strongly Agree), the use of a Likert scale at this stage of the survey will provide more detailed analysis of students' perceptions and their attitudes.

Section 4: Mechanisms of Influence

The fourth section is concerned with the mechanisms through which social media platforms may influence student's attention and behavior. These mechanisms includes questions related to algorithmic personalization, the engagement metrics (likes, views, and comments), and tendencies toward extended and unintentional usage. All elements in this section are measured using the same five-point Likert scale applied in Section 3. This section covers the theoretical framework of the study, especially on how platforms design their environments to attract and sustain user attention. It also seeks to determine the degree to which students are aware of these mechanisms and how they perceive them in their daily usage.

Section 5: Behavioral Impact

This section is the most intensive as it centered on the research objectives. It measures the possible changes in students' opinions, daily habits, and lifestyle preferences. The Likert-scale items also included one multiple-choice question asking respondents to describe the general influence of social media on their daily lives. Combining both Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions was relevant; it allows the researcher to gather detailed opinions, also offering a clearer view of students' perception of social media influence on their daily lives.

Section 6: Open-Ended Reflection

The sixth and final section of the questionnaire consists of one open-ended question inviting respondents to describe a personal experience in which social media influenced their thoughts, feelings, or behavior. Despite the quantitative method of this study, this question was included to give the participants an opportunity to express personal experiences and opinions may not be fully conveyed through close-ended questions. The qualitative data collected from this section will help, contextualize, and illustrate the quantitative findings.

3.7 Nature of Questions

The questionnaire combines different types of questions, each selected to measure a specific type of data. Table 1.1 below presents an overview of the question types, and justification for each.

Table 3.1. ***Nature and Justification of Question Types Used in the Survey***

Nature of Question	justification
Demographic	To establish the demographic profile of the student respondents, including age, gender, and field and level of study at Ibn Zohr University.
Multiple Choice	Multiple-choice questions give respondents different options and ask them to choose one or more answers that best suits their opinions. This type of question may include an "other" option for additional answers.
Likert Rating Scale	Requires a person to rate their level of agreement on a statement, usually from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree. Used to measure attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies.
Open-Ended	The open-ended question seeks to provide detailed qualitative information. Allow participants to express their minds using their own words.

3.8 Data Collection and sample

To collect the data required for this study, an online self-administered structured questionnaire designed using Google form platform. Online survey was the most convenient choice, since this is where the target population spends most of its time. The survey was distributed digitally via multiple social media channels. The data collection process expanded to include students from seven universities and faculties in the Souss-Massa region of Morocco. The Faculty of Languages, Arts and Human Sciences (FLASH) , Faculty of Letters and Humanities (FLSH), the Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences (FSJES), the Faculty of Sciences Agadir (FSA), the Higher School of Education and Training (ESEFA), the Faculty of Sharia and Legal Studies, and the Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taroudant. The survey consisted of close-ended questions based on the Likert scale; as well as, one open-ended question at the end of the survey allowing participants the opportunity to express personal experiences and opinions that may not be fully conveyed through closed-ended questions

At the beginning of the survey, students received a brief introduction, explaining the main purpose of the research, confirming that their participation was voluntary. Also, it did not request any personal identifying information, ensuring privacy and confidentiality; as all responses remained anonymous.

Overall, the survey received 200 responses, remained available online for one month, from 28 March 2026 to 29 April 2026 to maximize participation. However, 20 responses were excluded from the final dataset because some respondents submitted unfinished questionnaires, while others did not fit the study's target population. The final sample consisted of 180 valid responses .The respondents mainly belonged to the 18–35 age group targeted in this research, with the largest group being students aged 30 and above (36.7%), followed by students aged 22–25 (31.7%). As stated in the research question, the target population is mainly students aged between 18 and 35 years, though respondents above this age range were also welcomed, especially those pursuing Master's or doctoral degrees, as their contributions add analytical value and provide more insightful perspectives on social media use.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS ANALYSIS

This chapter constitutes the heart of this thesis; it presents and analyzes the results of the questionnaire distributed among university students at Ibn Zohr University in the Souss-Massa region of Morocco. The chapter analyses 180 valid responses applying descriptive statistics, percentages, and frequencies, across the six sections of the survey and interpreting them based on the research objectives and hypotheses discussed in chapter 3.

4.1 Section 1: Demographic questions

The first section of the questionnaire, involves the collection of demographic aspects of Ibn Zohr students, including age, gender, level and field of study.

4.1.1 What is your age?

Table 4.1. *Age Distribution of Participants*

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–21 years	26	14.4%
22–25 years	57	31.7%
26–29 years	31	17.2%
30 years or older	66	36.7%
Total	180	100%

Table 4.1 above shows the diversity of the respondent's age, the most dominant group are students aged 30 years or older, representing 36.7% of the sample. This means 66 participants in total .Other notable groups include students aged, 22–25 years represent 31.7% with 57 participants. Students aged 26–29 accounts 17.2% with 31 respondents, as for students 18–21 years, represents the smallest group holds 14.4% of respondents equivalent to 26 person. This data shows that the majority of respondents were in their mid-twenties early thirties with few people in early twenties.

4.1.2 What is your gender?

Table 4.2 Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	95	52.8%
Male	85	47.2%
Total	180	100%

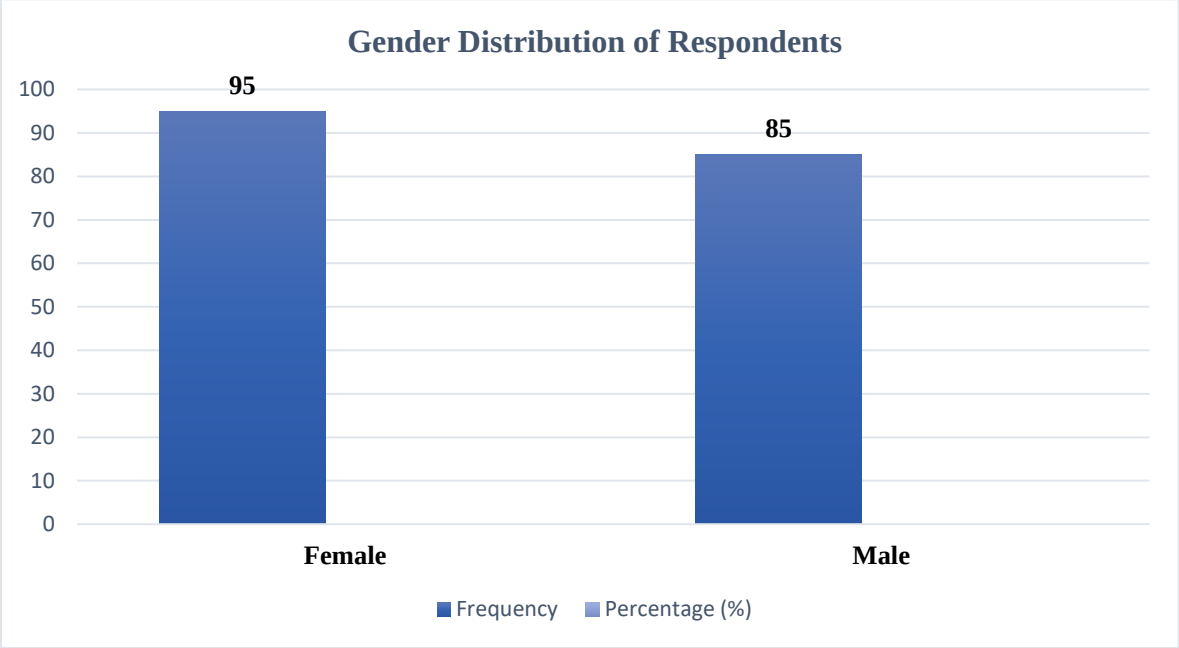

Figure 3. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Figure 3, gives a recapitulative of the gender of the respondents. The sample near-balanced gender distribution. Female respondents are 95, represents 52.8%. As for male they are 85, equivalent to 47.2% .The data reveals that the number of participants identified as female is significantly higher than male in gender distribution.

4.1.3 Level of study

Table 4.3 *Level of Study*

Level of Study	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bachelor (Licence)	77	42.8%
Master 1	49	27.2%
Master 2	47	26.1%
PhD (Doctorat)	7	3.9%
Total	180	100%

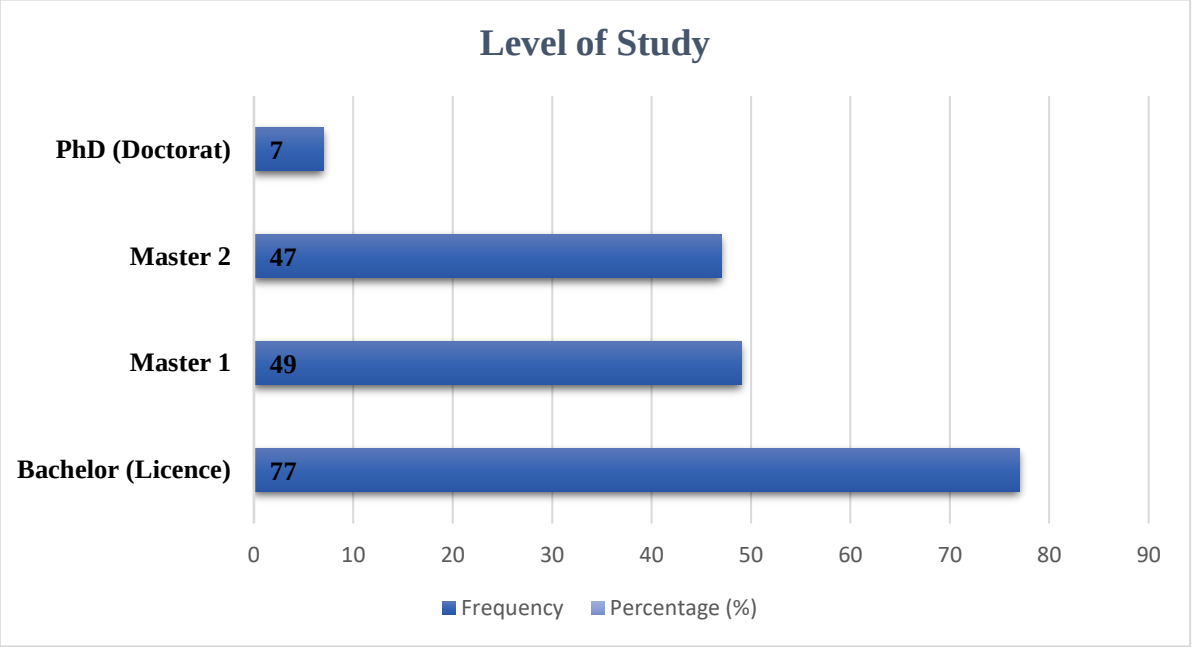

Figure 4. *Level of Study*

Figure 4 above, indicates the level of study of the participants. Bachelor's students have the largest percentage 42.8%. Master's 1 and Master's 2 students show almost identical results account for 27.2% and 26.1%. The smallest group were Doctoral students, representing 3.9% but still their contribution benefit. The data shows the diversity of academic levels, with bachelor's and master's degree mostly being the majority in the survey.

4.1.4 Faculty Affiliation of Respondents

Table 4.4 *Faculty Affiliation of Respondents*

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taroudant	57	40.0%
FLASH – Ait Melloul	**72**	31.7%
FSJES – Agadir	30	16.7%
FLSH – Agadir	8	4.4%
FSA – Agadir	7	3.9%
ESEFA – Agadir	6	3.3%
Total	180	100%

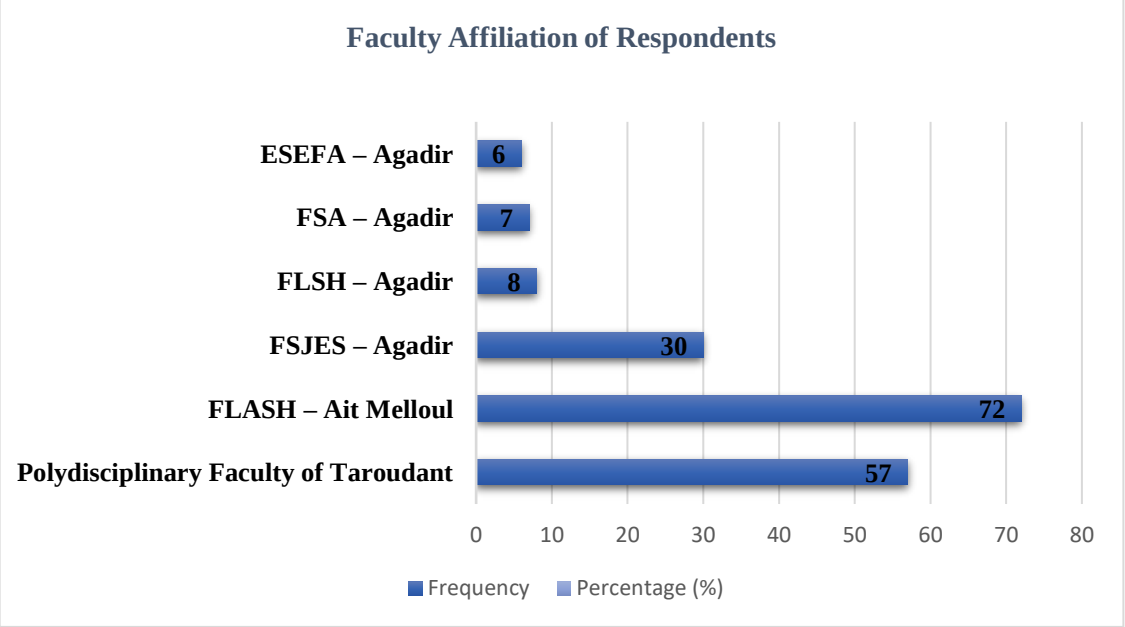

Figure 5. *Faculty Affiliation of Respondents*

Figure 5, illustrates the distribution of respondents from six different faculties. Starting with the researcher's faculty, FLASH Ait Melloul contributes the largest percentage of respondents, 40.0%, with 72 students, followed by Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taroudant representing 31.7% of the participants. The last three remaining faculties, FLSH, FSA, and ESEFA together represent 11.6%, with 21 participants in total.

4.2 Section 2: Social Media Usage habits

This section is designed to identify students most frequently used platforms, also the average time spent on them per day.

4.2.1 Platforms Used Most Frequently

Table 4.5 *Social Media Platforms Used Most Frequently*

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Instagram	119	66.1%
YouTube	106	58.9%
Facebook	103	57.2%
TikTok	55	30.6%
Snapchat	22	12.2%
X (Twitter)	17	9.4%

Note: Percentages exceed 100% as respondents could select multiple platforms.

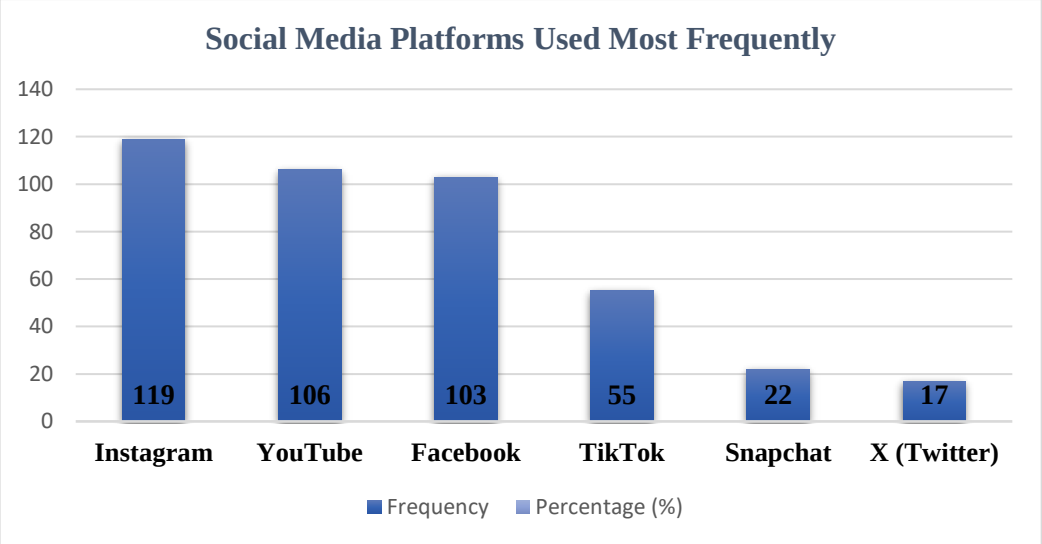

Figure 6. *Social Media Platforms Used Most Frequently*

The data on Table 4.5; illustrate Instagram as the most used platform, with 66.1% of respondents, indicating its relevance among Moroccan university students. Besides Instagram, I noticed that the participants use both Facebook and YouTube. Having nearly same percentages YouTube with 58.9% and Facebook at 57.2%. Even though Tiktok ranks fourth at 30.6%, most of its users are students in their early and mid-twenties, which aligns with Tiktok's target audience. The usage of other pairs platforms, Snapchat and Twitter have the lowest percentage, used by 12.2% and 9.4% of participants. The data demonstrate clearly the wide distribution of social media platforms, with Instagram taking the leading position.

4.2.2 Daily Time Spent on Social Media

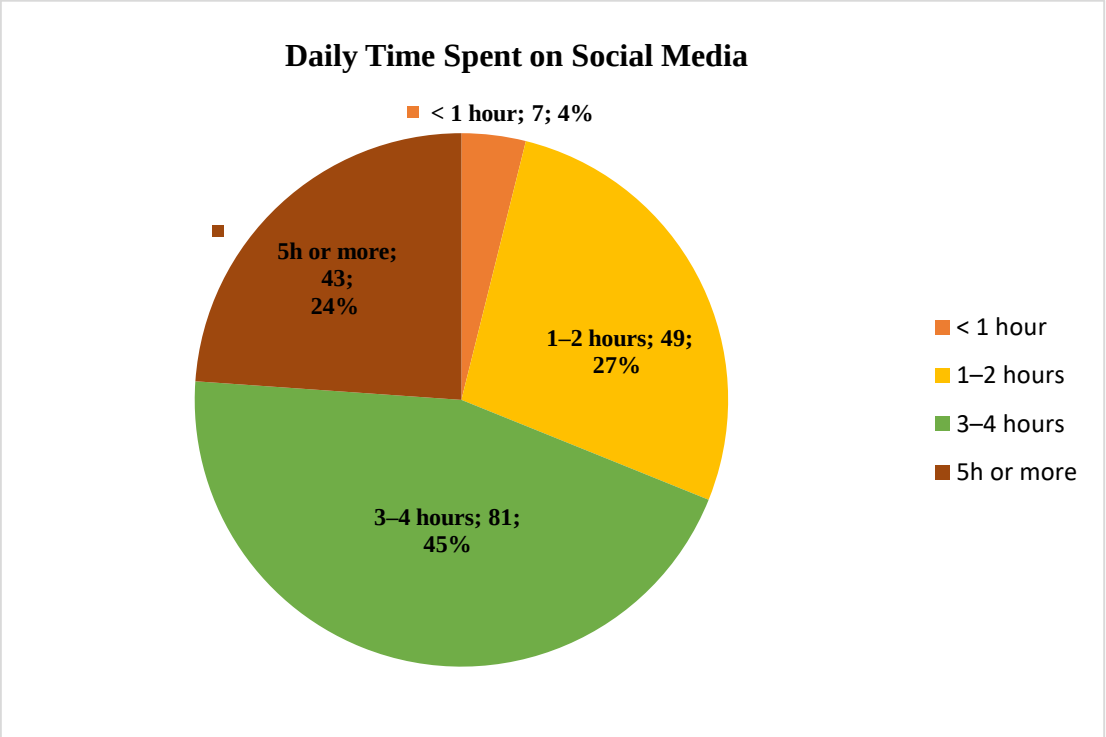

Figure 7. *Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media*

Figure 7 above, illustrate that the majority 45.0% of respondents spend between 3 to 4 hours per day on social media, standing as the most daily use hours. Whereas, 23.9% of participants spend more than 5 hours or more daily, this means 7 out of 10 students devote 3 hours to 4 hours daily on social media. Another category of students, represent 27.2% spend between 1 to 2 hours every day. Meanwhile, only 3.9% use these platforms for less than one hour per day. Overall, the results confirms that the majority of Ibn Zohr students has an active social media account and most of them spend over two hours daily on social media.

4.2.3 Main Reasons for Using Social Media

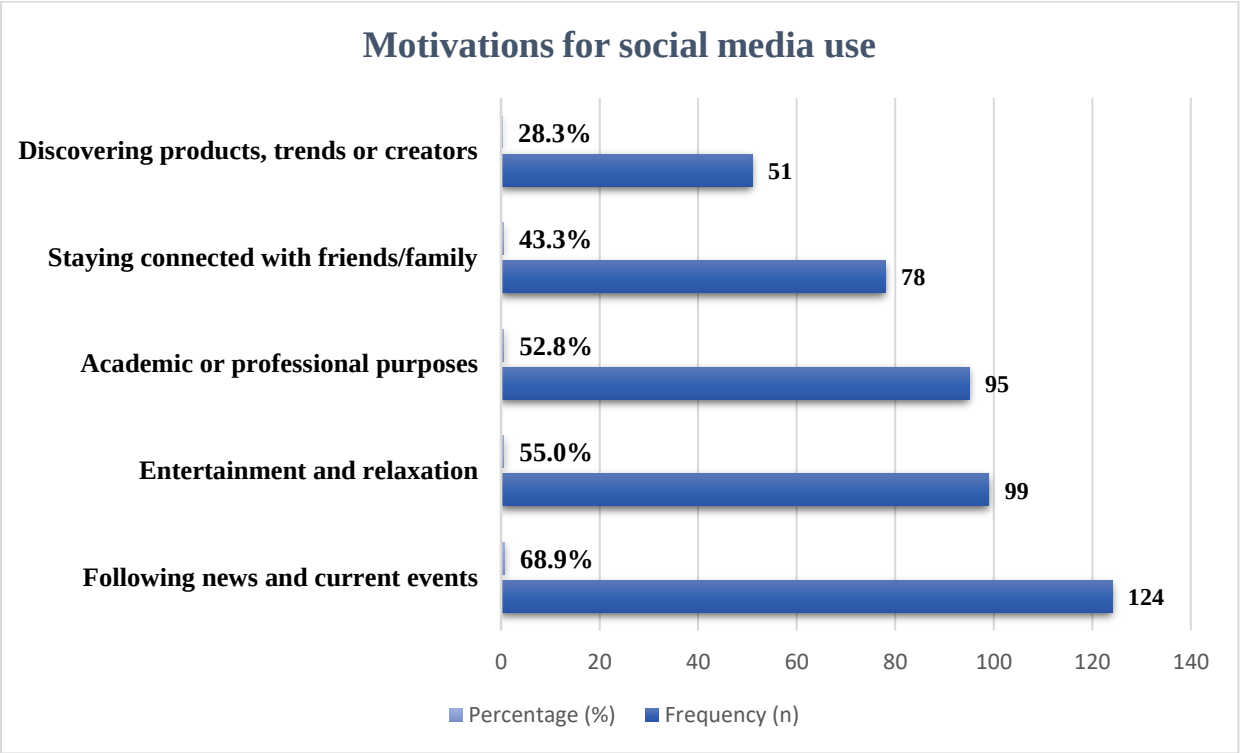

Figure 8. *Reasons for Social Media Use*

Figure 8 illustrate the primary purpose for using social media, is to follow news and current events, chosen by 68.9% of participants. Entertainment and relaxation takes the second position at 55.0%, while academic or professional purposes recorded similar percentage at 52.8%, which indicates that students use social media not only for leisure but also for educational activities. In addition, an important motivation for social media use by 43.3% is Maintaining connection with family and friends. At 28.3%, discovering products, trends, or creators is the lowest percentage in this data. These results demonstrate the variety use of social media; this diversity may depends on students' mood or priorities.

4.3 Section 3: Communication Practices

This section focuses on students' communication practices on social media, using three Likert-scale statements, related to self-perception, real self-expression, and engagement with content creators. The results rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (Strongly Disagree) to five (Strongly Agree). Using mean score to interpret each item: value below 3.00 refer to disagreement, a value of 3.00 indicate neutrality, above (M= 3.00) indicate agreement.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q8. I carefully select what I post online to project a positive image of myself.	17 (9.4%)	11 (6.1%)	25 (13.9%)	60 (33.3%)	67 (37.2%)	**3.83**

Table 4.6 ***Self-Presentation on Social Media***

The first statement in this section records the highest mean by (M=3.83), relative to 70% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with their selection of online content to project a positive image. Left with only 15.5% disagreeing with the item. These results demonstrate that the majority of students carefully select what they post online, to maintain self-presentation. Such behavior is consistent with Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management, explains that individuals intentionally manage what they share online, aiming to control how they are perceived.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q9. I feel free to express my real opinions and personality on social media.	25 (13.9%)	44 (24.4%)	55 (30.6%)	32 (17.8%)	24 (13.3%)	**2.92**

Table 4.7 Authenticity ***of Self-Expression***

The second statement refers to student's degree feeling free to express their thoughts and personality on social media. This item records the lowest percentage in this section, with 38.3% of participants disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. While only 31.1% agree with the statement. The data shows that 68 students do not feel free to express themselves online, which is interesting compared with question seven. This difference between appearance and digital identity is discussed in (chapter 2, literature review) as users create idealized version of themselves online.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q10. I regularly interact with content creators or influencers in my areas of interest.	27 (15.0%)	50 (27.8%)	44 (24.4%)	35 (19.4%)	24 (13.3%)	**2.88**

Table 4.8 ***Interaction with Content Creators***

This statement illustrate how often students interact with influencers or content creators in their areas of interest. The results of this item, records (M=2.88) the lowest mean in this section, emphasizing that interacting with content creators is not a regular practice among students. About 42.8% of participants disagree or strongly disagree, while 32.7% agree with the statement. Another important category, 24.4% of students with neutral responses, suggesting that, the nature of their relationship could be inconsistent. These results indicate that the majority of students consume influencer content without direct engagement, which supports Bandura's (1977) model of observational learning.

4.4 Section 4: Mechanisms of Influence

This section investigate the mechanisms through which social media platforms may influence student's attention and behavior. Using five-point Likert-scale, questions related to algorithmic personalization, the engagement metrics

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q11. The content recommended to me by the algorithm closely matches my interests.	14 (7.8%)	25 (13.9%)	42 (23.3%)	76 (42.2%)	23 (12.8%)	**3.38**

Table 4.9 ***Algorithmic Content Personnalisation***

The first statement registers a mean of (M=3.38), demonstrating a high level of agreement. A combined 55.0% of participants agree (42.2%) or strongly agree (12.8%).this indicates that the algorithms matches their interests. These results reflect the reality of social media how affective they are at personalizing profiles. Even though still 23.3% of respondents may not notice the relevance of these recommendations. Yet, 21.7% disagree with the statement.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q12. I am aware that social media algorithms influence what I see and how I feel.	8 (4.4%)	17 (9.4%)	37 (20.6%)	66 (36.7%)	52 (28.9%)	**3.76**

Table 4.10 ***Awareness of Algorithmic Influence***

This statement is extremely important, ranks as the highest mean in this section (M= 3.76), with 65.6% respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are aware of how social media algorithms influence their online activity. While only 13.8% disagree or strongly disagree with the item. The data reflect the level of awareness among university students. However, being able to recognize social media algorithms influence does not prevent its behavioral impact presented in the next section.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q13. The number of likes, views, or comments affects how much attention I give to a post.	23 (12.8%)	36 (20.0%)	34 (18.9%)	57 (31.7%)	30 (16.7%)	**3.19**

Table 4.11 Influence ***of Engagement Metrics***

The statement 12, registers a mean of (M=3.19), indicating the variety of responses among participants. The figures demonstrate that students obtain mixed opinions on this item, a combined of 48.4% agree or strongly agree on how engagement affect their attention to an online content. While 32.8%, disagree or strongly disagree. This variation present evidence in responses, as students may differ depending on how much they are affected by social mechanism on social media.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q14. I often keep scrolling for longer than I originally planned.	16 (8.9%)	32 (17.8%)	39 (21.7%)	62 (34.4%)	31 (17.2%)	**3.33**

Table 4.12. ***Unintended Extended Scrolling***

The last statement is the main part where we notice everyone falling into the habit of scrolling longer than originally planned. Records present a mean of (M=3.33), with 51.6% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, while 26.7% disagree with this statement probably because of their high algorithmic awareness. Having the knowledge on how the system functions may not be sufficient to resist its influence in real circumstances.

4.5 Section 5: Behavioral Impact

This section is the most intensive as it centered on the research objectives. It measures the possible changes in students' opinions, daily habits, and lifestyle preferences. The Likert-scale items also included one multiple-choice question asking respondents to describe the general influence of social media on their daily lives.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q15. Social media has changed or reinforced my views on social, cultural, or political topics.	15 (8.3%)	28 (15.6%)	39 (21.7%)	79 (43.9%)	19 (10.6%)	**3.33**

Table 4.13. ***Influence on Opinions and Views***

Question 18 focuses on whether social media has changed or influenced students' opinions and perspectives on social, cultural, or political issues. This statement records the highest mean in the section (M=3.33), with (43.9%) of participants agreeing and (10.6%) strongly agreeing, the combined percentage reaches 54.5%. compared to few students disagreeing with 23.9%.This result supports the idea that social media extent beyond entertainment, and change students perspective and opinions about their surroundings.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q16. After seeing content on social media, I have adopted new habits or changed my daily routine.	17 (9.4%)	36 (20.0%)	50 (27.8%)	64 (35.6%)	13 (7.2%)	**3.11**

Table 4.14 ***Adoption of New Habits***

This statement records a mean of (M=3.11) , indicating that 42.8% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that students adopted new habits or changed part of their daily life routine while consuming online content. This result supports my assumptions on the impact of social media in individuals' daily routine. Despite this, 27.8% of respondents remain neutral or uncertain about the direct influence of these platforms on their behavior. The data obtained from this statement are consistent with (Bandura, 1977), in his social learning theory, claiming that students often engage with multiple influencer's content and, through continuous exposure in the daily day basis, gradually grasp aspects of their lifestyle which lead to behavioral change .

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q17. Social media has had a positive influence on my personal interests and lifestyle.	17 (9.4%)	48 (26.7%)	43 (23.9%)	54 (30.0%)	18 (10.0%)	**3.04**

Table 4.15 Positive ***Influence on Life style***

This statement records the lowest mean (M=3.04); in this section, the responses appear balanced, indicating the diversity in students' opinions. The data shows 40% of students agree or strongly agree with the statement, claiming that social has influenced their life in positive way. Meanwhile 36.1% disagree or strongly disagree; those who disagree may possibly belong to the category of students, mentioned in the previous section 4 (mechanism of influence), aware of how algorithm functions. On the other hand, 23.9% participants choose to remain neutral, as they do not really see the difference in their real life.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
Q18. Seeing others' content on social media sometimes makes me feel inadequate or anxious.	33 (18.3%)	43 (23.9%)	47 (26.1%)	36 (20.0%)	21 (11.7%)	**2.83**

Table 4.16 Social *Comparison and Anxiety*

The final likert-scale statement investigate, observing other people's content on social media cause anxiety or other feelings among students. First, this statement considered as the lowest mean score (M=2.83). The results indicates that 42.2% of participants disagree or strongly disagree on feeling anxious while viewing others content. This significant percentage of disagreement may be associated with students who maintain their self-control (section 3, Q8). Based on the survey data, these students are mostly aged 30 or more, which explain the tendency towards disagreement. Meanwhile, 31.7% agree or strongly agree, this percentage remain important considering the continuous exposure to idealized online content influences how individuals perceive themselves. Aligning with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) in chapter 2, such comparison affect their self-perception negatively. This emotional response can either motivate self-improvement or result anxiety.

4.5.1 Students' overall Perception of Social Media Influence

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very positive	18	10.0%
Mostly positive	51	28.3%
Neutral	87	**48.3%**
Mostly negative	21	11.7%
Very negative	3	1.7%
Total	180	100%

Table 4.17 *Overall Perception of Social Media Influence on Daily Life*

The final statement in this section, to measure the general degree of influence on students' daily life. Almost half of the participants 48.3% describe this influence as neutral. These responses may appear neutral because social media is part of students' daily lives. Indeed other participants 38.3% perceive this influence as positive or strongly positive, while 13.4% describe it as negative. These data demonstrate that students maintain neutral judgments, because of their awareness on both positive and negative side of social media. This supports Boyd's theory, which explains that the influence depends on how individuals interact with digital content.

4.6 Section 6: Open-Ended Reflection

The ultimate question in the survey was necessary; Students were required to answer an open-ended question: Describe a specific moment when content you saw on social media changed the way you thought, felt, or acted. Which platform was it on, and what happened? This question allowed so many students to express their thoughts and share personal experiences. In general, out of 180 participants, more than 100 students' responded to this optional reflection, equivalent to 58%.

The large number of responses to this optional question is significant because it shows the relevance of this topic to students. The findings supports the decision to include a qualitative dimension in the survey. In fact, I was surprised while reading the responses, students did not gave short answers but they really took time reflecting on this matter and provided detailed answers in multiple languages (Arabic, French, English, and Darija). After reviewing all the answers, I chose the select the most relevant responses, which represent participants' different experiences from critical thinking, behavior, opinions, and emotional impact.

The most relevant responses are presented below:

Respondent 1 · *YouTube*
While watching a video about the signs of diabetes, I recognized some symptoms in myself. It made me pay more attention to my health, and since then I have started exercising.

This answer illustrates how social media content enhance the behavioral change of people's daily routine, based on observational learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

Respondent 2 · *LinkedIn & TikTok*
I saw a post from a developer sharing how he improved his skills by working on small daily projects. It made me realize the importance of consistency, so I started dedicating more time each day to practice and build my own projects.

Considering content creators as role models can influence student's habits and improve their self-discipline.

Respondent 3 · *Social media in general*
I always feel anxious whenever I see people meeting their dreams, travelling and doing so much. So I start to feel bad about myself. Over-comparisons make me broken.

I could not skip this comment because it provides straight evidence of the social comparison theory by Festinger (1954). Over-comparisons make me broken; this specific

phrase explains that the continuous exposure to social media content create negative psychological effect and reduce self-esteem.

Respondent 4 · *Instagram*

A video about the impact of consumption made me realize my responsibility toward the Palestinian cause. It changed my shopping habits, leading me to boycott certain products and choose alternatives rooted in solidarity, giving me a sense of hope and commitment.

This response reflects the behavioral influence of Instagram content, how can a video transform routine habit to a whole another level by increasing awareness and sense of responsibility, to making real life actions.

Respondent 5. Original French · *Instagram*

I saw someone showing a perfect life. Then I realized that these photos were carefully chosen and did not reflect the whole reality. I understood that I should not compare myself to others, because everyone has their own circumstances."

A very interesting testimony, illustrates a form of meta-cognitive awareness where individuals' intentionally manage what they share online, aiming to control how they are perceived.

Respondent 6. Original French · *Facebook*

I pay careful attention to everything that is said and shared on this platform. Before sharing any piece of information, I first consult reliable sources. I do not easily believe everything that circulates; I always adopt a critical mind.

What makes this reflection stands apart from other Reponses through its thoughtful and critical perspective to online content. Considering the importance of digital literacy before engaging with social media.

To sum up, these responses indicate that social media's impact on university students is neither uniform nor superficial. It operate through different processes, observational learning by observing other content creators, critical thinking, feelings and personal beliefs. These effects could lead to small adjustments in daily routines or profound changes in identity. The richness and variety of responses, covering multiple languages, and personal experiences validate the purpose of using open question as a qualitative data in a quantitative research design.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter of the thesis, there will be a discussion of the research findings presented in chapter 4, in light of the literature review developed in chapter 2 and the main three hypotheses suggested in the introduction. The purpose of this discussion is not to revisit the results already presented, but to interpret their meaning about the influence of social media on communication practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioral changes of Ibn Zohr university students in the Souss-Massa region of Morocco.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

Before addressing the three hypotheses, it is crucial to contextualize the results about social media usage habits, as they constitute the foundation for the future interpretation. The data demonstrate that the target population studied is distinguished by the wide distribution of social media platforms use. Instagram taking the leading position with (66.1%), YouTube (58.9%), and Facebook (57.2%), while Tiktok used by 30.6% of participants. Considering that, the majority of students has an active social media account and most of them spend over three hours (68.9%) daily on social media.

The first hypothesis stated that social media communication produces measurable impact on the communication practices of Ibn Zohr University students. The results presented in Section 3 were consistent with this hypothesis. For instance, in Question 8 the majority of students 70.5% carefully select what they post online, to maintain self-control and display a positive image of themselves. This data shows that strategic self-presentation is the most frequent communication practice among the students. Such behavior is consistent with Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management, argues that individuals behave like performers in social life, in other words ,they intentionally manage what they share online, aiming to control how they are perceived. Simultaneously, based on Q9 results, 38.3% of students report a lack of freedom to express their personality online and real opinions. The difference between question 8 and 9 illustrate the obvious gap of how students project themselves on social media does not match their identity. This argument is documented in the previous studies on digital identity, especially in Stuart Hall’s (1996), perspective that identity is not fixed; but instead it is a dynamic process where elements are constantly changing. While question 9, suggests that 42.8% of students consume influencer content passively rather than participatory. In other words, students prefer to stay in their comfort zone and observe digital

content without directly engaging with it, which supports Bandura's (1977) model of observational learning.

The second hypothesis stated that algorithms and personalized content influence the way users construct their digital identity. The data presented in section 4 were consistent with this hypothesis. Starting with Q12, which recorded the highest mean in the section 3.76, indicates that 65.6% of participants acknowledge the effect of social media algorithm on the content they follow and the emotions associated with it. However, the result in Q13 revealed that 51.6% of students keep scrolling longer than they originally planned; demonstrating that being conscious on how the algorithms operate does not protect users from the influence of platform design and user retention mechanisms. This paradox supports Alter's (2017) argument (chapter 2, mechanism of influence), that social media are intentionally designed to maintain user's attention, through a psychological mechanism known as variable reward scheduling. Q11 (M = 3.38) further indicates that 55.0% students perceive algorithms as effective in matching content to their personal interests. This result aligns with Cardon's (2015) concept of behavioral algorithms, which explains how algorithms deliver personalized content grounded in users' prior interactions, over time it forms their preferences. These findings validates the role of algorithms in constructing digital identity of users.

The third hypothesis stated that Moroccan digital consumers show signs of dependency that influence their behavior and critical thinking. It measures the possible changes in students' opinions, daily habits, and lifestyle preferences .The data provide limited support for this hypothesis. On the behavioral side, Q15 (M=3.33) demonstrates that 54.5% of students perceive social media as influencing their opinions on social, cultural, or political issues, presenting evidence for the capacity of social media to guide users' attention towards specific issues, in line with Agenda-Setting Theory. On the psychological level, Q18 records the lowest mean in the study (M=2.83), indicating that anxiety related to social comparison does not occur among most students. This significant percentage (42.2%) implies the psychological aspect of dependency is complex and does not manifest in the same manner among all students. The general perception in Q20, Almost half of the participants 48.3% describe social media's influence as neutral. This does not mean an absence of social media influence, instead it shows that social media has become deeply integrated into students' everyday life. To the point, where Students no longer perceive its effects as unusual or intrusive. Consistent with van Dijck's (2013) theory explaining how digital platforms make constant connectivity appear normal and natural.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research began with a question about a generation and ended with something more precise: a documented, research-based analysis of how social media transform communication, construct identity, shape personal values, and affect perceptions, through mechanisms that are often neglected or accepted without critical thinking. In the comprehensive study presented in this paper, I have examined the multifaceted influence of social media on individuals in various aspects, specifically on the communication practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioral change of students at Ibn Zohr University in Morocco.

Anchored in the literature review of self-presentation (impression management) (Goffman, 1959), mass self-communication (Castells, 2009), social learning (Bandura, 1977), social comparison (Festinger, 1954), digital identity, Papacharissi (2011), and algorithmic influence (Pariser, 2011), and other relevant theories that also contributed to unpacking the complex mechanisms behind social media. To connect theory with lived reality the study relied on quantitative method based on 180 valid survey responses collected from seven faculties, this research explicated a clear and empirically grounded answer to its fundamental question: social media exerts a significant and persistent influence on Moroccan university students altering multiple aspects of their lives.

The current study illustrates that networked platforms are not merely a communicative tool but a decisive mechanism in redefining youth identity. Undoubtedly, social media altered the way students engage and present themselves online. They are capable of managing their online identities through selective self-presentation, which create a significant gap between the identity students' display online and their real life identity. This discrepancy does not result only from individual choice; social media platforms also encourage users to seek validation, visibility, through platform's reward logic of likes, comments and follower counts. Regarding mechanism of influence, the findings reveal a paradox that constitute one of the most important results of this research. Even though, 65% of students are aware that their feeds are personalized, platform design extend engagement beyond their conscious intention and still modify their behavior in response to the content they consume.

Awareness alone does not guarantee resistance or self-regulation. From a behavioral perspective, this research confirms that student' opinions, perceptions; daily habits are influenced in substantial ways. The results indicate that a notable segment of students report feeling of anxiety, comparison and even inadequacy as they are exposed to content on a daily basis.

The findings support the three hypotheses, with H3 receiving partial support. The results suggest that the Moroccan sociocultural context influences the psychological effects of social media, as communal values and religious identity continue to determine individuals' attitudes and responses. A final interesting observation in this study is the percentage of students describing the overall influence of social media as neutral. However, this does not indicate its absence, because the data prove its existence across every section of the questionnaire. I contend that this influence has become invisible, normalized and further integrated into students' lives.

6.2 Contributions of the Study

This research makes significant contributions to the field of Information and Communication Sciences, both in Morocco and in the broader literature on social media influence among young adults. The study's findings indicate that there is a well extensive research on the role played by social media in altering students' perceptions, behaviors, and daily habits. Hence, the current study contributes to existing studies from an academic perspective and brings value to the argument of whether social media exerts influence on Moroccan university students. From an academic point of view, this thesis might be one of the first quantitative analysis of social media influence among students at Ibn Zohr University in the Souss- Massa region, using validated theories and designed survey tool from seven different faculties. This research also presents, the theories of Erving Goffman, Albert Bandura, Leon Festinger, Manuel Castells, Stuart Hall, Eli Pariser, and Adam Alter are applicable to the Moroccan digital environment, a finding that existing research had not clearly illustrated for this target population and region. This research also gives an overview of its contextual grounding. Integrating a section on the Moroccan digital context was essential to interpret its results. Drawing on Azizi (2019) on internet use and digital expression, Baumeister (2001) on negativity bias, and Ilahiane (2021) on mobile phone culture. This study situates its empirical results within the specific social, cultural, linguistic, and algorithmic conditions that define platform use in Morocco.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

As with all empirical research, a number of limitations that must be acknowledged. This thesis relies on diverse sample from seven faculties in the Souss- Massa region, but remains geographically confined to this specific area, and does not represent all Moroccan university students. The methodology is cross-sectional and self-reported, which are known constraints from the start, meaning that we could receive unfinished surveys or participants providing inaccurate responses. This study documents what students do, how they present themselves on social media, and how their behavior changes. Yet, it does not measure what sustained social media use does to the brain, how these students think, and their capacity for independent reasoning, these are cognitive dimensions suggested by the data that the methodology was not designed to measure.

That cognitive dimension is, in my view, the most important direction for future research to pursue. Moroccan university students are aware of how algorithms influence their perceptions and yet they still cannot resist it, raises a deeper question: to what extent does sustained social media use reconfigure the way students think, and does it erode their ability to think independently that higher education requires? Carr (2010) claims that prolonged digital platform use reconfigures human cognition, diminishing the capacity for sustained deep attention. If that argument applies to Moroccan university students, as the findings of this study suggest, then the implications extend f beyond communication studies revealing new areas such as digital literacy, educational policy, and the Moroccan higher education system. A future study could combine quantitative cognitive assessments with the survey methodology applied in this thesis could initiate efforts to explore these issues further. The current study provides a theoretical groundwork and methodological basis for further investigation to proceed.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Faculty langues, arts et sciences humaines, AIT MELLOUL

Social Media & Digital Consumer Behavior in Morocco

Master's Thesis Questionnaire, Information & Communication

Dear Participant,

This questionnaire is part of a Master's research in Information and Communication at faculty langues, arts and human sciences. The study investigates how social media platforms particularly Instagram and TikTok shape communication practices, mechanisms of influence, and behavioural patterns among Moroccan university students.

Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. All responses will be used exclusively for academic purposes.

1 Demographic Information

Q1. What is your age?

- **a.** 18–21 years
- **b.** 22–25 years
- **c.** 26–29 years
- **d.** 30 years or older

Q2. What is your gender?

- **a.** Female
- **b.** Male

Q3. What is your level of study?

- **a.** Bachelor (1-3)
- **b.** Master 1
- **c**. Master 2
- **d.** PhD

Q4. Which faculty do you study at?

a. Faculty of Languages, Arts and Human Sciences Ait Melloul (FLASH)
b. Faculty of Letters and Humanities (FLSH)
c. Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences (FSJES)
d. École Supérieure d'Education et de Formation - ESEFA
e. Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taroudant
f. Faculty of Science, Ibn Zohr AGADIR (FSA)
g. Faculty of Sharia, Ait Melloul

2 Social Media Usage Habits

Q5. Which social media platforms do you use most frequently?

a. Instagram
b. TikTok
c. Facebook
d. YouTube
e. X (formerly Twitter)
f. Snapchat

Q6. How much time do you spend on social media per day, on average?

a. Less than 1 hour
b. 1 to 2 hours
c. 3 to 4 hours
d. 5 hours or more

Q7. What is your main reason for using social media?

a. Entertainment and relaxation
b. Staying connected with friends and family
c. Following news and current events
d. Discovering products, trends, or creators
e. Academic or professional purposes

3 Communication Practices

Statement	1 – Str. Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Str. Agree
Q8. I carefully select what I post online to project a positive image of myself.	○	○	○	○	○
Q9. I feel free to express my real opinions and personality on social media.	○	○	○	○	○
Q10. I regularly interact with content creators or influencers in my areas of interest.	○	○	○	○	○

4 Mechanisms of Influence

Statement	1 – Str. Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Str. Agree
Q11. The content recommended to me by the algorithm closely matches my interests.	○	○	○	○	○
Q12. I am aware that social media algorithms influence what I see and how I feel.	○	○	○	○	○
Q13. The number of likes, views, or comments affects how much attention I give to a post.	○	○	○	○	○
Q14. I often keep scrolling for longer than I originally planned.	○	○	○	○	○

5 Behavioural Impact

Statement	1 – Str. Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Str. Agree
Q15. Social media has changed or reinforced my views on social, cultural, or political topics.	○	○	○	○	○
Q16. After seeing content on social media, I have adopted new habits or changed my daily routine.	○	○	○	○	○
Q17. Social media has had a positive influence on my personal interests and lifestyle.	○	○	○	○	○
Q18. Seeing others' content on social media sometimes makes me feel inadequate or anxious.	○	○	○	○	○

Q19. Overall, how would you describe the influence of social media on your daily life?

a. Very positive
b. Mostly positive
c. Neutral: neither positive nor negative
d. Mostly negative
e. Very negative

6 Open-Ended Reflection

Q20. Describe a specific moment when content you saw on social media changed the way you thought, felt, or acted. Which platform was it on, and what happened?

Thank you for your participation

Appendix B

Faculté des Langues, Arts et Sciences Humaines Aït Melloul

Master d'excellence : Information et Communication

Médias Sociaux et Comportement du Consommateur Numérique au Maroc

Cher(e) participant(e),

Ce questionnaire s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une recherche de Master en Information et Communication à la Faculté des Langues, Arts et Sciences Humaines. L'étude examine comment les plateformes de médias sociaux, façonnent les pratiques de communication, les mécanismes d'influence et les comportements des étudiants universitaires marocains

Votre participation est entièrement volontaire et anonyme. Toutes les réponses seront utilisées exclusivement à des fins académiques. Il n'y a pas de bonnes ou de mauvaises réponses votre avis honnête est ce qui compte.

Section 1 : Informations démographiques

Q1. Quel est votre âge ? *

- ○ 18–21 ans
- ○ 22–25 ans
- ○ 26–29 ans
- ○ 30 ans ou plus

Q2. Quel est votre sexe ? *

- ○ Femme
- ○ Homme
- ○ Préfère ne pas répondre

Q3. Quel est votre niveau d'études ?

- ○ Licence (1–3)
- ○ Master 1
- ○ Master 2
- ○ Doctorat

Q4. Dans quel établissement étudiez-vous ? *

- ○ Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines Agadir (FLSH)
- ○ Faculté des Langues, Arts et Sciences Humaines - Aït Melloul (FLASH)
- ○ Faculté des Sciences Juridiques, Économiques et Sociales (FSJES)
- ○ École Supérieure d'Éducation et de Formation (ESEFA)
- ○ Faculté Polydisciplinaire de Taroudant
- ○ Faculté des Sciences- Agadir (FSA)
- ○ Faculté de la Charia -Aït Melloul

Section 2 : Habitudes d'utilisation des réseaux sociaux

Q5. Quelles plateformes de réseaux sociaux utilisez-vous le plus fréquemment ? (Plusieurs réponses possibles) *

- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ X (anciennement Twitter)
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Autre : _____

Q6. Combien de temps passez-vous en moyenne sur les réseaux sociaux par jour ? *

- ○ Moins d'1 heure
- ○ 1 à 2 heures
- ○ 3 à 4 heures
- ○ 5 heures ou plus

Q7. Quelle est votre principale raison d'utilisation des réseaux sociaux ? *

- ○ Divertissement et détente
- ○ Rester en contact avec amis et famille
- ○ Suivre l'actualité et les événements
- ○ Découvrir des produits, tendances ou créateurs
- ○ Objectifs académiques ou professionnels

Section 3 : Pratiques de communication

Veuillez indiquer votre niveau d'accord avec chacune des affirmations suivantes *

Échelle : 1 = Pas du tout d'accord 2 = Pas d'accord 3 = Neutre 4 = D'accord 5 = Tout à fait d'accord

Affirmation	1	2	3	4	5
Q8. Je sélectionne soigneusement ce que je publie afin de projeter une image positive de moi.	○	○	○	○	○
Q9. Je me sens libre d'exprimer mes vraies opinions et ma personnalité sur les réseaux sociaux.	○	○	○	○	○
Q10. J'interagis régulièrement avec des créateurs de contenu ou des influenceurs dans mes domaines d'intérêt.	○	○	○	○	○

Section 4 : Mécanismes d'influence

Veuillez indiquer votre niveau d'accord avec chacune des affirmations suivantes *

Échelle : 1 = Pas du tout d'accord 2 = Pas d'accord 3 = Neutre 4 = D'accord 5 = Tout à fait d'accord

Affirmation	1	2	3	4	5
Q11. Le contenu recommandé par l'algorithme correspond étroitement à mes centres d'intérêt.	○	○	○	○	○
Q12. Je suis conscient(e) que les algorithmes influencent ce que je vois et ce que je ressens.	○	○	○	○	○
Q13. Le nombre de likes, de vues ou de commentaires influe sur l'attention que j'accorde à une publication.	○	○	○	○	○
Q14. Je continue souvent à faire défiler le fil d'actualité plus longtemps que prévu initialement.	○	○	○	○	○

Section 5 : Impact comportemental

Veuillez indiquer votre niveau d'accord avec chacune des affirmations suivantes *

Échelle : 1 = Pas du tout d'accord 2 = Pas d'accord 3 = Neutre 4 = D'accord 5 = Tout à fait d'accord

Affirmation	1	2	3	4	5
Q15. Les réseaux sociaux ont modifié ou renforcé mes opinions sur des sujets sociaux, culturels ou politiques.	○	○	○	○	○
Q16. Après avoir vu du contenu sur les réseaux sociaux, j'ai adopté de nouvelles habitudes ou modifié ma routine quotidienne.	○	○	○	○	○
Q17. Les réseaux sociaux ont eu une influence positive sur mes centres d'intérêt et mon mode de vie.	○	○	○	○	○
Q18. Voir le contenu des autres sur les réseaux sociaux me fait parfois me sentir inadéquat(e) ou anxieux (se).	○	○	○	○	○

Q19. Dans l'ensemble, comment décririez-vous l'influence des réseaux sociaux sur votre vie quotidienne ? *

- ○ Très positive
- ○ Plutôt positive
- ○ Neutre : ni positive, ni négative
- ○ Plutôt négative
- ○ Très négative

Section 6 : Réflexion ouverte

Q20. Décrivez un moment précis où un contenu vu sur les réseaux sociaux a changé votre façon de penser, de ressentir ou d'agir. Sur quelle plateforme était-ce, et que s'est-il passé ?

Merci pour votre participation.